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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

EMPOWERMENT? WHAT BEING LITERATE MEANS TO MAITHILI WOMEN IN NEPAL

by

SAMIRA LUITEL

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

International/Intercultural Education

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring, 1996

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Samira Luitel

Ka 1-37 Balkhu, Tekusi

Kathmandu - 14, Nepal

Date: Nov. 30, 1995

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The undersigned certify that they have read and recommend to the faculty of graduate studies and research for acceptance, a thesis entitled EMPOWERMENT? WHAT BEING LITERATE MEANS TO MAITHILI WOMEN IN NEPAL submitted by SAMIRA LUITEL in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in International/Intercultural Education.

.....
Dr. Marilyn Assheton-Smith (Supervisor)

.....
Dr. Toh Swee Hin

.....
Dr. Peggy Wilson

.....
Dr. Eloise Murray

.....
Dr. Sue Scott

.....
Dr. Angela Miles (External Examiner)

Date: March 23, 1995

DEDICATION

To

My Parents

and Family

ABSTRACT

Reading and writing skills have been considered major sources of empowerment in the modern world. Literacy in this sense has been emphasized as a force for empowering people. It has been understood that people are marginalized and are reluctant to change without literacy and hence, if illiterate, they suffer from all the hazards of life. Literacy and development programs based on a technocratic/functionalist paradigm assume that economic enhancement and living conditions will solve the problems of development, whereas programs based on a critical paradigm consider raising critical consciousness necessary for empowerment and development. Both of these paradigms have been used in most of the developing countries in the last two decades.

The objective of this study was to see what empowerment meant to Maithili women in Nepal who participated in a literacy program, and how empowerment was associated with their participation in the program. This study has also examined the way these women associated empowerment with the changes in the women's social, economic and psychological conditions after their involvement in the literacy program.

This study was conducted with women who had participated in one of the literacy programs run by Save the Children USA in a village of Siraha district, in the eastern *terai* region of Nepal, a predominantly Maithili speaking area. The overall strategy of Save the Children USA was to empower women with literacy, skill training and awareness raising programs. The locale was selected on the basis of my own experience as a woman and housewife in that area, and also taking into account literature that showed a lower female status there compared to other communities in Nepal. Case studies of six women who participated in the literacy program formed the basis of the study, supplemented by observation and interviews with other people in the community and program area.

This study concludes that the meaning of empowerment for those women who had completed the literacy program was associated with acquisition of, or improvement in, the national language (Nepali), an increase in knowledge, greater economic independence and increased mobility, and increased self-confidence, and that not only the literacy program itself but the income generation program and the development of a women's group were significant elements in this 'empowering' process. It also identifies some changes in the women's lives brought by the program, but notes the resistance to change in the household and the inability of the program to serve young women or "daughters-in-law" in households.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Working at the Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) as a research officer I had an opportunity to study more thoroughly different areas of development and about the people living in the rural areas of Nepal. It was during this period that I developed an interest to do more research on women and came to know that women's time spent in the field and their life situations in Nepal were miserable due to poverty, illiteracy and cultural barriers. Although women from different communities have their own social status, the dominant Hindu culture of the country has an influence in all communities with men regarded as ruler of the household and women as their subordinates. The state laws based on patriarchal value systems give the right to the inheritance of property only to the sons undermining the importance of a daughter in her parental home. She is thus seen as a burden by her parents until she is given in marriage to someone from whom she can find security in her life.

As I worked, the questions that often came into my mind and to which I wanted to find an answer were - why was a woman's life so different and miserable compared to that of a man? Why were women not free as men and why did they always seem to need men's assistance in everything? Who made the situation of women so miserable that she needed some one's voice to speak for her? Why were more women illiterate than men, and why were only men given power in the wider society while women work more than men in the family? Why was a man's work regarded as more prestigious than that of a woman while she is the one who takes the total household responsibility and responsibility for the children which is the most important part of life? Why was a girl's education not regarded as important as that of a boy even though she will be responsible for procreating children? Why were women not given a chance to be responsible mothers even to the extent of restricting their access to one of the main sources of knowledge i.e. education? Were men only responsible for this situation of women or was something else?

The overall answer to these questions can be found in CERID and other publications of the last fifteen years relating to the status of women in Nepal. A girl in Nepal is not a desired child and so she does not get a chance to education, bears a low social and moral value in the society, performs the most arduous jobs throughout her life, and often possesses a lower self image than her male counterpart. She is denied education

because of the area of work envisaged for her as an adult (household chores), the need for her labour at home, and the poor economic condition of the parents (Acharya, 1981; CERID, 1984; RIDA, 1992). Apart from these factors the main fact is that parents see no return from the cost they pay for a girl's education, as she goes to another's house after her marriage.

Although the difficulties outlined above faced particularly by girls and women were not widely recognized at the time, eradication of illiteracy was put forward by the United Nations in the decade of the 1960's as one of the main strategies to solve problems similar to the above in developing countries. Two major assumptions - that illiteracy is a major obstacle to development and literacy is a fundamental human right - guided Unesco's program during this decade. As many other developing countries, Nepal has followed the UN mandate and literacy programs were organized at that time to make the people literate with an emphasis given to the skill of reading and writing. During the second phase (1965 -74) literacy was aimed at making people functionally literate to fit them into the development process in the hope of economic growth and returns. It was then believed that illiteracy was the major cause of all hazards of life and literacy was important for a person and country to progress. Based on this belief, functional adult literacy programs were also administered in different parts on Nepal.

But it is apparent that all these programs had little effect on women in Nepal when the female literacy rate in 1971 was only 3.6% (Census Report, 1971). It was in this context that I was interested in conducting a study to see the effect of literacy in women's lives, whether it has been able to bring change in their lives, and what factors were associated with the presence or absence of such change.

Conceptual framework

While the decade of 60's saw the necessity of literacy as a means to improve people's lives, the decade of the 70's gave another dimension to the notion of literacy in most of the developing countries. Influenced by Freire's critical pedagogy literacy programs during this decade put much emphasis on critical issues relating to political, economic, social and cultural aspects of individual's lives. In the words of the expert team writing an evaluation of the Experimental World Literacy Program: "Just as development is not only economic growth, so literacy ... must aim above all to arouse in the individual a critical awareness of social reality, to enable him or her to understand, master and transform his or her destiny" (Unesco, UNDP, 1976). Many heads of states committed to this idea of literacy in the "Declaration of Persepolis". However, it was the Tanzanian

president Julius Nyerere, who in his opening speech titled "The Objectives and Strategies for Adult Education and Development in 1976", emphasized that education should aim at developing consciousness in people's minds, a power over themselves, their environment and societies. Literacy was henceforth conceived as a "political, human and cultural process of consciousness raising and liberation." Basic education for all children and adults was seen as an essential part of the literacy movement, but the idea of basic education was not just basic skills in reading and writing, or a technical-functional literacy; it included the change of consciousness described above.

Although women were one of the target groups of all the literacy programs, they became the priority area only during the decade of the 70's when the UN declared 1975 as Women's Year. Efforts were made to collect data on women and analyze it so it would be possible to prioritize programs for them. In many developing countries women's contribution was not considered important, nor was it seen as yielding the same benefit to the economy as that of men. Women who, in these countries, contributed more than 70% to the household economy and constituted half of each country's population were neglected in development plans. Gradually, it was realized that without their participation economic growth or development of a country would be only a dream. As in many other developing countries, in Nepal various non-formal education programs were launched to enhance women's condition and literacy was attached to every development activity to be undertaken for women.

During the decade of the 80's the advocates of adult literacy and non-formal education programs began talking much about empowerment; in their belief eradication of illiteracy and economic enhancement is what it means to empower people, especially the illiterate rural women. The main focus of these programs from then onwards has been literacy and income generation, and such programs have been massively administered throughout much of the 'developing' world, including Nepal. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations are involved in administering them. They consider the purpose of such programs as being to empower women with the literacy skills which they lack, which will enable them to use the development benefits and the income generation programs that are made available to help uplift their economic condition. Thus, it is women who lack knowledge due to illiteracy and who lack property due to having no property rights who are supposed to benefit from such literacy programs. Yet, research in Nepal shows that although women are the major participants of the literacy programs, the situation of women has not changed much despite an effort of nearly more than two

decades with, for example, the Census Report of 1991 showing female literacy at only 25% (RIDA, 1992; Census Report 1991).

The literacy situation, and the condition of women in Nepal made me curious to know why, in the case of women, literacy or education did not seem to progress despite much effort. Why was literacy not regarded as an important aspect for women in Nepal? What literacy was given to women and what was envisaged from it? In this context I felt it necessary to find out more in this area and see how women were participating in the literacy program which aimed at empowering them and what meaning they gave to empowerment after becoming literate.

There are a variety of meanings proposed in the literature on literacy and empowerment. My study is based on the philosophy that an empowering literacy program should be able to generate the hidden capability in individuals and develop a sense of confidence, what Kreisberg (1992) calls the "power with" notion in an individual. According to him:

> Empowerment embodies the idea of self-determination, a process through which individuals and communities increasingly control their own destinies without imposing on others. The link between controlling one's own life and valued resources while simultaneously respecting others' rights to do the same is crucial to empowerment theory. (p. 191)

Besides the above theory, I also considered what other critical as well as feminist theorists say about women's empowerment through literacy. Feminist argue that pedagogy for women's empowerment must address each and every issue that affects women. Miller (1982) suggests that the study of women is a study of parts of human potential that have not been fully seen, recognized or valued but which have to be brought into action in the conduct of human affairs. Empowerment according to her is 'capacity' to implement and change, that is 'becoming able'.

Stromquist (1988) observed that empowerment pedagogy must consider cognitive, psychological and economic components whether they address literacy or other forms of education. Education programs seeking empowerment for women according to her must involve women in all stages of the projects to ensure they are able to solve problems in the long run.

Bhasin (1992) holds a strong feminist view and advocates that an empowering education should recognize women's contribution and knowledge by helping women fight their own fears and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Qualities such as nurturance,

caring and gentleness should also be promoted in men if we are to make a just society. Education according to her should challenge patriarchal knowledge, norms, values, and behaviour patterns. It should enable women to not only master the 3 R's but also to 'read' their lives, make their destinies through acquiring necessary skills, and build confidence and strength so they can refuse to submit to conditions of indignity and inhumanity. Education should liberate women from the burden of ready made answers which are given by the dominant cultural and political structures. It should help them in questioning and challenging authority and domination; education should bring out the best in every individual.

Ramdas (1990) regards literacy as a quest for justice, which should enable every girl and woman to walk fearlessly and confidently with her head held high. Reading and writing skills she believes, would then truly become a weapon with which each woman can be empowered; that alone is true justice.

Parajuli and Enslin (1990), in a study of a women's literacy project in Nepal, contend that an empowering education is not one that imposes alien knowledge but one which critically regenerates the history and culture of the participants. It should reveal the conflicting interpretations of knowledge between dominant and subordinate groups, such as men and women or high and low castes, in the same society.

Teaching non-violence strategy such as bravery, truthfulness, determination, solidarity, and compassion is another strategy of empowering literacy . According to Lakey (1987), non-violence is a traditional way of teaching people to exercise their power without harming others, and making them powerful as a group. A group consensus is what is sought in an empowering literacy of non-violence.

In light of the above critical theories of empowerment I decided to observe whether or not the functionalist literacy program of Save the Children USA has been considered by women to be an empowering process in bringing to them a change in their social/political situations, a change in their economic situation, and a change in their psychological situation.

Statement of the Problem

Considering these situations of women, I asked myself - what can bring a change in this state of women in Nepal? How can they become able to think as individuals by themselves? What kind of education (knowledge) do women require to overcome a feeling of inferiority and live in dignity and self-respect? What can provide women with vigour

and make them feel more courageous? What kind of power do women need to be empowered in this sense?

With these theories and general questions as background, I took as my research focus what women mean by empowerment through literacy and whether or not they were empowered socially, politically, economically and psychologically as the theorists of empowering literacy believe. My specific research questions were:

1. What meaning do women give to being empowered as a result of their being literate?
2. Has literacy been perceived as a source of empowerment to women?
   - bringing change in relation to their social and political situations
   - bringing change in relation to their economic situations
   - bringing change in relation to their psychological situations

These areas were identified in view of the empowering education as described by various pedagogues of critical literacy who argue that an empowering literacy should bring change in people's social/political, economic, and psychological situations especially for women as they are a oppressed group in most societies.

Selection of a research site

One way for me to begin to answer these questions was to study the empowerment of women who had participated in a literacy program in Nepal, for I thought that empowerment should have been the purpose of literacy programs for women who posses low social status due to the reasons mentioned above. The first stage was identifying women who were most likely to be suppressed in Nepali society and the second to identify some of those women who had taken a literacy program with empowerment goals. But once I had decided to work with women who were likely to be suppressed, it was still hard for me to decide from what community I should choose my research site.

Even though women generally represent a suppressed group in Nepalese society, various studies have shown that in some communities women play a major role in decision making processes in their respective household. The Newar women of Bulu (Pradhan, 1981), the Tharu women of Dang (Rajure, 1981), the Kham Magar of Thabang (Molnar, 1981), and the women of Baragaon (Schuler, 1981) have been presented and treated as equals in their community. Similarly, equality and freedom among the Rai women have been described by McDougal (1973); among the Limbus by Jones (1976); among the Sherpas by Haimendrof (1964); among the Rana Tharu of Kailali by Bista (1967) and

among the Tamang by Holmberg (1989). All of these women described by the writers are very hard working and live on their own earnings,[1] and with a literature which points so clearly to these women as relatively powerful in their own communities in Nepal, it seemed appropriate to search elsewhere for this study.

In comparison to the women in other communities the women from the *terai* region have the lowest decision making power and so hold even the lowest position in their respective household where all the decisions including household decisions are mostly made by men (Acharya and Bennett, 1981). Acharya and Bennett revealed that of the total eight communities they studied, the women in the *terai* region had almost no decision making power even at home or on the farm. The *terai* men also possessed a very high-self image of themselves in contrast to the men from the hills. Considering this situation of *terai* women, and my own experience as a daughter-in-law in that area I decided to do my study there.

Within that area I chose a community in which there had been a literacy program run by Save the Children USA as it was considered to be one of the successful programs in Nepal and was running in Siraha, a district adjacent to my home place. Apart from this, one of the strategies of Save the Children's program is to empower women through literacy and income generation programs. So it was reasonable to include in my study women who had taken literacy training in this program with the aim of looking at how women perceived empowerment in relation to their literacy experience.

Organization of thesis

In the pages which follow, I have reviewed the literacy and empowerment literature, to identify in detail the analysis it provides of the place of literacy in social change. Next, I have described the education of women in Nepal to see what educational programs were developed to enhance the condition of women in Nepal. Following, in the fourth chapter, is a methodology chapter which documents the approach I have used to gathering data, both on the social context in which women of the *terai* live and from the women themselves on their experience of literacy.

---

[1] Women in these communities may have a say in their household chores and farm-work but it does not mean that the main economic decision in relation to disposal of property or in buying economic assets are done by women. Although women are often capable of making decisions regarding domestic and farm work the major decisions are made by men in all of the communities.

To foreshadow the discussion in chapter five on the field, documentary sources have been used to provide educational and economic background for this area of Nepal, and a period of time living with the women in the village and talking with them has provided local details as well as their perceptions of the literacy program which make up chapter six. Some of those details have been supplemented by interviews with other people who have been attached to Save the Children USA or who are working in the study village. Thus, the primary information gathered through this research is presented in two chapters, one describing the social context and the other the women's experience with the literacy program.

In the final chapter I return to address the one major question which has arisen out of all my other questions. Have literacy programs in Nepal, specifically the one I observed, contributed to the empowerment of women? If so, to what extent and in what way? What does empowerment in the context of literacy mean to these women? Although no definitive answers are expected to these, my research questions, I do expect the exploration of them to provide ideas to the women and men in the community, to Save the Children USA and other literacy program providers in Nepal, and to the overall non-formal educational institutional structure of the country. That is, my hope is that this document will contribute in some small way to the empowerment of women in Nepal, and to the building of better communities for women, children, and men in the society.

Chapter 2

Literacy, Women and Empowerment

Introduction

The skills of reading and writing have been considered a major source of empowerment in the modern world and literacy as a force for empowering people has been discussed in literature in various ways. The literature reflects an understanding that people are marginalized and are reluctant to change without literacy and hence they are sufferers of all hazards of life (Unesco/ UNDP, 1976). The believers of the technocratic/functionalist paradigm of literacy education hold that learning to read and write will result in economic enhancement and better living conditions which will take care of all the problems of underdevelopment, whereas the believers of the critical paradigm of literacy education regard raising critical consciousness as necessary for empowerment, and empowerment as necessary to change the social circumstances which created both the illiteracy and the other problems which peoples have in their lives.

During the first development decade (the 1960's onwards) the United Nations emphasized the need of eradicating illiteracy to enhance the condition of people in developing countries. Both the above mentioned paradigms have been utilized up to the present in many of the countries, and the focus or target of these programs are mainly women who constitute the majority of the illiterate population. An analysis of the situation by region and by sub-region shows that the percentage of illiterate women over the age of 15 is 64.5 in Africa, 47.4 in Asia, 19.2 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 10.2 in the Pacific (including 64.5 in Melanesia) and 70.4 in the Arab States. The least developed countries (LDCs) have a female illiteracy rate of 78.4 percent (Chlebowska, 1990).

This section includes the major topics and the components of the literature regarding literacy and empowerment, and their role in the development of women with a brief discussion of critical, feminist and development theories on this topic.

Literacy Concepts and Strategies

The term "literacy" is derived from the Latin word "Literatus" which means a minimal ability to read Latin. Later the term included the art of writing and up to the present both reading and writing skills are considered necessary for one to be a literate person. But the question of the language one is learning to use for reading and writing, which is suggested by the Latin origin of the word, is seldom addressed in discussions of

literacy. Overall the tendency is to assume a standard form, or 'correct' form of the language, and in a national context the 'national' or 'official' language or language legitimized by the state (Street, 1993; Bourdieu, 1991).

By definition literacy is supposed to provide any kind of knowledge according to the need of the learner and their desire to learn. Ramdas (1990) gives two main meanings to being literate citing dictionary definitions. The first is "to be learned" which she defines as one "having learning", one with knowledge and who learns. This definition of "literate" makes no link between the state of being "learned" and the ability to read and write or have access to and control over the written word. The second, and recently more commonly employed definition of "literate" is being able "to read and write" which is the definition most of the nation states have followed.

As with others, Ramdas follows the lead of United Nations groups in observing that literacy should not be limited to the meaning of the three R's, which is how it has been used in many countries as the basis for literacy campaigns. In her opinion these campaigns met more a political economic motive of the governments for national security and for preparing the population to use technology that has been necessitated in the economy since the Second World War. Even so, due to lack of resources and in spite of the need of human resource development, most nation states are unable to define literacy in any but the most narrow sense of the word (Ramdas, 1990).

Lind & Johnston, (1986) point out that at the international level, Unesco's changing recommendations regarding how literacy and functional literacy should be defined may be classified in terms of three chronological periods. During the first period, 1945-64, the stress was on fundamental education, the need for community development, and on the promotion of non-formal programs for adults and children in which they were taught some literacy, that is the ability to read and write, but no numeracy.

During the second period, 1965-74, the concept of functional literacy was introduced at the World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy held in Tehran in 1965. Functional literacy was accepted as 'an essential element in overall development . . . closely linked to economic and social priorities, and to present and future manpower needs'. Functional literacy was seen as those reading and writing skills which were needed in everyday life and in the job market. Adult literacy was then tied to economic requirements giving priority to projects design to further economic and social development (Unesco, 1965).

Following UNDP and Unesco's evaluation of the Experimental World Literacy Program (EWLP, 1976) and inspired by Paulo Freire's radical pedagogical movement of the 1970s, literacy was critically reviewed and refined for the third time. In July 1975, the expert team recommended the following:

> The concepts of functionality must be extended to include all its dimensions: political, economic, social and cultural. Just as development is not only economic growth, so literacy ... must aim above all to arouse in the individual a critical awareness of social reality, and to enable him or her to understand, master and transform his or her destiny. (Unesco, UNDP, 1976)

In a conference on "Relationship between adult non-formal education and development" Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere declared that development should help to expand people's consciousness and power over themselves, their environment and societies. He stated that:

> Education has to increase men's (sic) psychological and mental freedom -- to increase the control over themselves, their own lives, and the environment in which they live. The ideas imparted by education or released in the mind through education should therefore be liberating ideas. The skills acquired by education should be liberating skills . . . . In particular, it has to help men (sic) to decide for themselves -- in cooperation --what development is. (Nyerere, 1976, p.10)

Literacy was henceforth to be conceived of as a political, human and cultural process of consciousness raising and liberation. Basic education for all children and adults was seen to be an essential part of the literacy movement.

This definition of literacy was derived from the "Declaration of Persepolis" in 1975 and put forward by heads of states from around the world discussing the issue of worldwide strategies for education in the future, and was a turning point with respect to literacy definitions and strategies. The Persepolis conference rejected the narrow work oriented approach and demanded a literacy for liberation. Influenced by Freire's 'conscientization' approach, it demanded that literacy should teach 'critical consciousness' making people capable of 'acting upon their world, of transforming it' for 'authentic human development'. It demanded structural changes in the political, social and economic institutions of developing countries to make the practice of literacy possible (Bataille, 1976). The idea of literacy for critical consciousness, for empowering and for total liberation from oppressive structures then spread like wildfire in the conceptual world of literacy and literacy for development (Bhola, 1989, p. 486).

Unesco, taking a somewhat different perspective in its promotion of literacy since 1945, has constantly put forward the two assumptions underlying their approach, namely that illiteracy is a major obstacle to development and literacy is a fundamental human right. These two assumptions lead to prioritizing literacy in most of the Unesco's program. Unesco's objectives of literacy (1983) explains the following:

> The eradication of illiteracy does not banish deprivation over night. But by eliminating one obstacle to development it will indirectly help to improve living and working conditions. (p. 7)

This consideration of literacy as a human right is associated with the Unesco initiative to achieve a more equitable distribution of educational resources, thereby enabling all the peoples of the world to lead a socially and economically more productive life. The rational for treating literacy as a human right has been explained by Ali Hamadache (1989) as follows:

> The problem of illiteracy . . . must be seen first and foremost in terms of inequalities; between individuals, between specific groups or categories of the population, between clearly defined areas within a given country and between countries themselves. These persistent inequalities and the resultant frustrations engender tensions which in turn underlie conflicts, the more so in that unequal access to knowledge goes hand-in-hand with unequal access to well being." (p. 3)

In the evaluation of EWLP the expert team recommended that literacy is necessary as a national priority to raise the cultural level of the population, to break with a past of ignorance linked to domination and exploitation, and to build a democratic society. . . for these reasons the concept of functionality must be extended to include all its dimensions: political, economic, social and cultural. Just as development is not only economic growth, so literacy - and education more generally - must aim above all to arouse in the individual a critical awareness of social reality, and to enable him or her to understand, master and transform his or her destiny (EWLP, 1976).

It is apparent that since 1975, a new definition of functionality is emerging which includes the essence of both work oriented literacy and that of literacy for liberation; that is which sees literacy as central in all social change. Literacy is seen as a doorway to all knowledge, and as the 'hard currency' for acquisition of all knowledge whether it be for economic, social or political purposes (Bhola, 1989).

Implicit or explicit in these discussions was the notion of literacy for all, for if it was a human right it must be available to all humans. One result was the move to giving

priority to literacy for women in the total development context. For the functionalists learning is a link between the development of the individual and the development of the society. The role of women in this context is realized as vital due to the fact that women constitute 50% of the population and the majority of them are still illiterate. Writing for Unesco Chlebowska (1990) states:

Literacy training should contribute to the higher earnings and improve the living conditions of rural women by helping them to escape from poverty, marginalization and, inferiority. It should also make for enhanced personal well-being, greater confidence and self respect, an awareness of their own values as women and of their creative abilities, while the limitations imposed upon them are not immutable. (p. 55)

According to her the definition of literacy should take into account the intrinsic link between the degree of knowledge possessed by an individual and his/her immediate environment, especially for Third World countries. However, in the case of rural women, this definition must be refined in the light of the realities of their milieu and adapted to the specific aspirations and needs of the female population to acquire a degree of literacy. A literate rural woman in her sense would be defined as a person who possesses sufficient knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic to guarantee an improvement in the quality of her own life and that of her family, and to facilitate her full participation in the development of the group and the community.

Realizing the need to continue to encourage women's literacy, in 1990, the United Nations declared that year International Literacy Year, giving priority to women's literacy as the main focus area, and a World Conference on Education For All (WCEFA) was held in Jomtien, Thailand. It was organized and sponsored by several major International donor agencies including UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, USAID, WORLD BANK, IDRC and CIDA. In the opening address CIDA's representative, Mr. Pierre Beemans, stated:

> Sharing our Future, outlining CIDA's most recent development assistance policy, ... emphasizes the importance of women in development and literacy to the success of a wide range of programming initiatives be it in the field of agriculture, health, or human resource development. (WCEFA opening address)

A literacy program for women was envisaged as a catalyst in improving their condition as well as to make them able to participate in various development activities both as beneficiaries and active participants. It was believed from the functionalists point of view that literacy training will be more readily accepted by women if it enables them to

improve the living conditions of their family, that is health and nutrition; increase productivity and earnings; assure better conditions for their children; gain an understanding of new technologies and acquire easier access to cooperatives and their management as well as to credit.

Despite the earlier mentioned notion that the content of literacy was initially seen as unimportant, for it was a skill independent of content, it soon became apparent that the curriculum of literacy programs were subject to the same problems as the curriculum of schooling. Consequently, the messages carried about development or information for other purposes but used for literacy, have been criticized by the critical thinkers as ones which still encourage the traditional reproductive role of women. This critique contends that even though these messages are specifically meant for women, they have made little contribution in the treatment of women's problems within a broader project of social transformation. The biased nature of such literacy programs according to Stromquist has helped in maintaining definitions of women as supportive actors in the theater of men, with no legitimate aspirations for self outside marriage and motherhood. But it is exactly these definitions which constitute the cornerstone of patriarchal ideology, defining women's superiority in the home and her inferiority anywhere else (Stromquist, 1988, p.8).

Feminists argue that the functional role of women is belittling to women and limits their existence; they claim that until there is no suppression and patriarchal values in the society (which is in most cases protected by the national law) no program can work for the benefit of women. This problem has been widely recognized in the world. For example, a poem from a poster in Papua New Guinea goes as follows:

> Beware the tricks of "training for women"
> special projects
> deceptive education
> token extension
> illusive equality
> that starts and ends at home
> as housewives
> "having little or no opportunity
> to actively engage
> enthusiastically participate
> in all forms of social and economic life"
> Don't be trained, taught, educated

to occupy yourself with trivia
the "toy" development
of household trappings
and the things they call "women's work"
yet ridiculed and dismissed in the analysis of "real" work
of man-hours
and man-made definitions of development. (Quoted in Miles, 1989: p. 10)

Looking at the stark reality of women's condition in most parts of the world, feminists have been demanding a 'liberating' role of literacy for the greater well-being of women, the first step towards justice, better control over their own existence and fuller and more equitable participation in the life of society with greater freedom from economic exploitation and patriarchal oppression. Although not opposed to women learning the technical skills of reading and writing which may improve their economic prospects, they do not consider adequate the practical 'functional' approach which advocates technical literacy training as an instrument for a better life or - more immediately - for the very survival of women and their families (Chlebowska, 1990).

Literacy was thus considered necessary for people by organizations such as Unesco to make people functionally viable, enhance their participation in development, and to bring parity in educational inequalities, whereas for Freire, for feminist activists and theorists, and for other critical thinkers it is an instrument to make people critically aware with liberative ideas. Both the liberatives and functionalists believe that education can be a hope to women enabling them to participate in development, but the liberative thinkers have gone beyond that point and criticized the domesticating aspect of literacy which according to them has not only been of little help in transforming women from their traditional role, but has contributed to keeping them within that role.

What underlies this transformative understanding of the role of literacy education is an analysis of the relation of women to the social structure. That is, the situation of women is seen not simply as people who 'lack' something but people who live in a set of social relations which continuously disadvantages them and makes it difficult for them to live their lives in satisfying ways. It effects women in their relations in the family, in their relations to the economy, and in their general ability to acquire resources from credit or capital to literacy. Thus, the solution is not merely to 'give' them some skill, but to do so in a way which will enable them to continue to change their social circumstances, that is to provide skills such as literacy in a way which 'empowers' them, or increases their capacity to act in

all the settings which make their life difficult. What does this idea of empowerment refer to? How is it described in the literature?

Genealogy of Empowerment

Empowerment emerged as an important theme in the women's movement, in community organizing and the rise of the "new populism," and in the progressive movement for peace and social justice of the '70s and the '80s. The idea and term empowerment emerged as a direct response to analyses of powerlessness and critiques of social structures and social forms that perpetuate domination and the corresponding urge to understand, identify, and describe processes through which individuals and communities create alternatives to domination. Thus empowerment is seen as a process that demands both personal and institutional change. It is a personal transformation out of silence and submission that is characterized by the development of an authentic voice. It is a social process of self assertion in one's world (Kreisberg, 1992, pp. 18-19).

Empowerment involves individuals gaining control of their lives and fulfilling their needs, in part as a result of developing the competencies, skills, and abilities necessary to effectively participate in their social and political worlds. An essential component in this process is the development of a critical awareness (Freire, 1970) of one's social condition and society in general: that is, the development of a critical cultural literacy, the ability to critically analyze one's social and political world on multiple levels as a prelude to and integral component of action (Kreisberg, ibid.). As it is for Gramsci, Bowles & Gintis, Giroux, and Freire, Kreisberg feels that dominating behaviour is a social phenomena, that patterns of domination are stubbornly persistent in society; and that these patterns are ultimately shaped by humans, and thus are transformable by human action (p. 16).

Julian Rappaport (1981) notes that empowerment marks a movement away from a paternalistic notion of "helping" as a way of addressing individuals' needs and deficiencies to a notion of change that focuses on assuring individuals and communities of their rights and responsibilities. It moves from imagery and symbolism that relies on others to solve our problems to the fostering of a belief in our capacities to help ourselves and others.

Kaleel Jamison (1984) in what he calls the nibble theory of empowerment places emphasis on the process of self-empowerment. According to him, "empowerment starts from inside out. It does not work outside in" (p.49). Through it people grow by nibbling, by taking in small bits of knowledge or skills or experience, sometimes quickly sometimes slowly, through coming in contact with other people. Not only positive but negative influences and experiences may add to growth. Empowerment is something,

some process, which is in the person and which Kaleel calls a "kernel". He comments that one should understand one's own "kernel of power" and let it grow. Like lighting a candle, which does not lose self power by giving to others, nibbling involves sharing each with the other and provides growth without reducing oneself or others.

Discussions on empowerment emphasize the importance of community - of support and shared struggle in the process of empowerment. Empowerment comes through mutual dialogue and shared work to improve the lives of particular individuals while at the same time trying to improve the lives of all individuals in a particular community. Individual empowerment is tied to community empowerment. Thus empowerment is often described as a process of individual and group transformation in which individuals and groups come to develop "mastery of their lives" and "control of valued resources" and to develop skills in "interpersonal influence" and "participatory competence" through group problem-solving and collective action. Most empowerment theorists see individual and community destinies as interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Kreisberg, p. 20).

Kreisberg states that the pervasiveness of domination as the common mode of human social relationship, and its connection to violence and injustice in a range of cultures, suggests two central challenges for those who seek to develop pedagogies of empowerment. First, it is necessary to develop a critical understanding of domination. This calls for the development of a critical cultural literacy, one that can uncover what Maxine Green has called the "taken for granted world" and the ways in which domination functions in society and in our lives. Most importantly, it means we must identify and explore the situations that present opportunities for resistance and change.

Second, he suggests the need to find new modes of relationships which are not based on domination and submission and are not organized into hierarchies of the powerful and powerless and to seek alternative ways of thinking about ourselves, our communities, and our world. More profoundly, empowerment calls for developing new ways of being with other people that can nourish emerging critical awareness and nurture a new set of needs and desires in everyday experience (pp. 17-18).

Kreisberg discusses the terms "power over" and "power with" in connection with empowerment. Empowerment as he says is not "power over" which has a sense of domination but it is "power with" the quality that individuals possess. "Power with" offers a conception of power that is not based on domination, imposition, and control of others. Nevertheless, theories of empowerment must deal with the realities of power in our culture,

which means that they must come to terms with "power over" and the reality of domination as well.

Janet Surrey (1987) links "power with" and empowerment, arguing that empowerment is nurtured through "power with" relationships. At the heart of these empowering power relationships is "response/ ability," the capacity "to act in relationship." Response/ability involves "the capacity to engage in an open, mutually empathetic relational process" (p.6). In relationships such as these, individuals have the capacity to be responsive to, indeed to be "moved by the other person's thoughts, perceptions and feelings. . . . both people feel able to have an impact on each other and in the movement or 'flow' of the interaction" (p.7).

Some explain knowledge as a valuable resource which gives and reinforces power. They believe that transformative learning empowers when it enables people to create the kind of knowledge which yields power. According to Conti et al, the process of social transformation begins with the learners' collective knowledge that they have choices and control change. Transformative learning deals with creating critical awareness of power relationships and empowering people with the knowledge to change power relationship, because power is at stake, and because it is the dominant power system that is generally challenged (Deshler & Selener, 1991).

But this notion is not new; for the last two decades social scientists have been advocating the power of knowledge as a source of empowering people. It was Paulo Freire (1974) who first talked extensively about literacy and empowerment and liberation through learning. According to him the education process is never neutral and persons are either educated for domestication or liberation. Where there exists a dominant culture of silence, people are taught to accept what is handed down to them by the ruling elite. They live only to carry out unthinkingly and unquestioningly orders from above. Their understanding of reality is limited to what they are told to accept and believe - the myths that keep them silent and in ignorance. However, when education and literacy liberate they shatter the silence and bring people to an awareness of their condition and to their democratic rights to participate in making decisions regarding the problems of their existence. The concept of 'conscientization' is fundamental to Freire's understanding of literacy and education. His literacy method is not only to make adults able to read and write but to enable them to think for themselves.

When empowerment was implied in development it added 'participation' to consciousness raising and both became an essential component of development. That is,

empowerment seeks to combine both consciousness raising and participation so that individuals not only understand their society and the place they currently have in it but undertake efforts to modify social relations. Freire's notion of consciousness raising and Gramsci's concept of the civil society both imply that the empowerment process must provide a chance to the broad mass of individuals and the groups within society to take an active role in that society if a legitimate and fair state is to emerge.

The empowerment approach to development according to Moser (1991) was developed out of dissatisfaction with the original Women In Development approach which was an equity approach, because of the latter's perceived co-optation into what might be called simple anti-poverty and efficiency approaches. However, the empowerment approach differs from the equity approach not only in its origin but also in its identification of the causes, dynamics and structures of women's oppression and in terms of the strategies it proposes to change the position of Third World Women. It recognizes that feminism, the analysis of the situation of women which locates women in a dominating gender structure is not simply a recent Western, urban, middle-class import.

According to Jayawardena (1986) the women's movement was not imposed on women by the United Nations or Western feminists, but has an independent history. Since the late 19th century, Third World feminism has been an important force for change, but with women participating more often in nationalist and patriotic struggles, working class agitation and peasant rebellions than in the formation of autonomous women's organizations. Although the empowerment approach acknowledges inequalities between men and women, and the origins of women's subordination in the family, it also emphasizes the fact that women experience oppression differently according to their class, race, colonial history and current position in the international economic order.

The empowerment approach according to Moser (1991) acknowledges the importance for women of increasing their power; it seeks to identify power less in terms of domination over others, and more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their own self reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to make choices in life and to influence the direction of change through the ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material resources. A succinct articulation of the empowerment approach as cited by her has been made by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) whose purpose has been to analyze the condition of the world's women and formulate a vision of an alternative future society. The exemplars of some of the organizations working on these strategies in the Third World are cited as GABRIELA (an alliance of local

and national women's organizations) in the Philippines, and SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) in India. The empowerment approach recognizes the triple role of women and seeks through bottom up women's organizations to raise women's consciousness enabling them to challenge their subordination.

The thesis of empowerment emerged from the feeling of powerlessness with the belief that powerlessness is both a social reality and a psychological experience, and empowerment is necessary for both social transformation and personal liberation. The philosophy of empowerment suggests that individuals can alter their situation by changing their environment with their critical knowledge, and not merely by 'mastering' the traditional domestic role. Empowerment questions the essence of "taken for granted knowledge", and stresses making people critically aware.

Women and Empowerment Issues

Beginning in the early twentieth century a few women social scientists and psychologists have challenged the dominant discourses of power that were based on relationships of domination. The alternative discourse presented by these theorists is emerging in theory and research. Today feminists have taken the lead in developing alternative conceptions of power by pointing out that women's experiences are a form of subjugated knowledge that has been silenced and excluded by dominant patriarchal discourses. Miller (1982) notes "the undeniable truth that the world has been explained so far without the close observation of women's experiences" (p.5). She argues that women's experiences with power "bring new understanding to the whole concept of power" (p.2). According to her the study of women involves study of parts of the total human potential that have not been fully seen, recognized or valued and therefore have not flourished. They are precisely the ingredients that must be brought into action in the conduct of human affairs.

As one example of such undervalued behaviour Friedmann (1992) says "solidarity among women often transcends a purely utilitarian calculus and may be maintained simply for the pleasure it affords: this kind of relationship is psychologically empowering" (p. 51). He gives three examples of collective empowerment among women:

- Social mobilization around women's major concerns (i.e. divorce, property rights, cost of living, peace and the environment)
- Change in women's state of mind
- Gains in access to the bases of social power

All three kinds of empowerment according to him are relevant to women's struggle and may be thought of as forming an interconnected triad (Figure Below). When this triad, centered on an individual woman and household is linked up with others, the result is a social network of empowering relations that, because it is mutually reinforcing, has extraordinary potential for social change. The two figures below illustrate the linking first of these three kinds of empowerment, and the further linking of a number of similar triads.

FIG. 1 Forms of empowerment

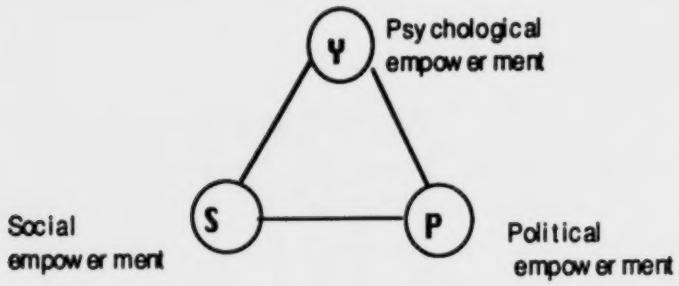
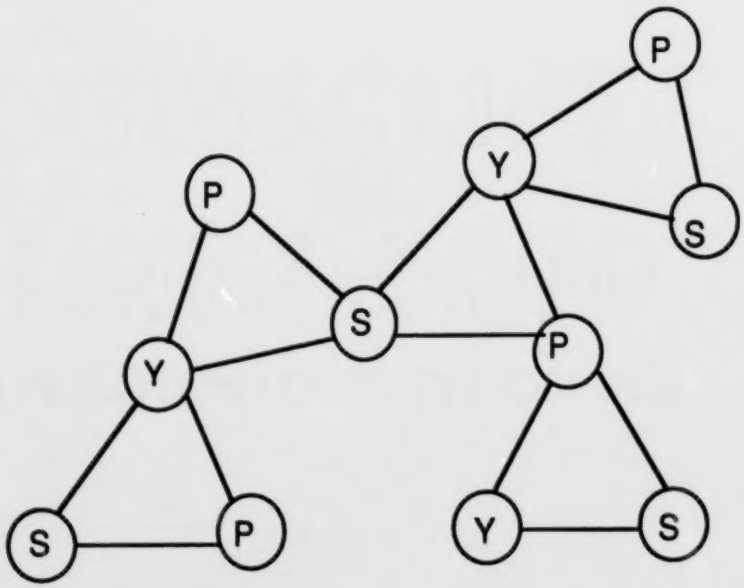


FIG. 2 Empowering networks



Friedmann further observes that women working with other women on projects they find empowering- in production cooperatives, political movements, or mutual support groups- can accomplish a great deal more than a single woman acting for herself alone. Networking and organization- that is, acting collectively- tend to reinforce the process of women's social, psychological, and political empowerment.

Miller defines empowerment as capacity to implement activities and make changes which connotes the meaning of "being able". According to her "women need the power to advance their own development, but they do not 'need' the power to limit the development of others" (p.117). Surrey's (1987) responsibility and Miller's capability have the same meaning. They emphasize the "power with" theme in empowerment and stress the importance of connection of ongoing relationships as nurturance, mutuality, community, openness to change and growth, and maintaining the relationship. Miller (1982) describes a central theme in human development as "agency in community". In its healthiest expression agency-in-community is manifest when individuals support and enhance one another's empathic, generative and assertive qualities.

The question of women's empowerment was raised by the feminists during the decade of women when they tried to explain what empowerment means to women. Stromquist (1988) suggests, a full definition of empowerment must consider cognitive, psychological and economic components. The cognitive component according to her refers to women's understanding conditions of subordination and the reasons creating those conditions such as taboos in sexual knowledge and also knowledge of legal rights.

The psychological component should include aspects that help build self-confidence and self-esteem in women as 'participants' not as 'beneficiaries'. Education programs seeking empowerment for women according to her must involve women in all stages of projects, so that they become able to solve their problems by themselves in the long run.

- The economic component of empowerment is to provide women with some kind of productive activity that will allow them some degree of independence. According to her women's empowerment will not occur by simply asking for it; some difficult questions should be considered in programming, such as: how do the program objectives benefit women as citizens?

- what are the program components that address the cognitive, psychological and economic aspects of empowerment?

- what supportive mechanisms (e.g., child care, medical services, residential facilities, wages, etc.) are there in place to allow the transition from reproductive and productive orientations to empower goals?
- in what ways are the participants showing evidence of demanding satisfaction of their rights?
- what assistance is being provided to the women-run voluntary development organizations so that they can develop stronger institutions and become self-sustaining?

When women are able to continue their organization and mobilization efforts outside the framework of a specific project and create organizations to defend their interests then they are empowered. The process of empowerment will liberate women from subordination and exploitation (Stromquist 1988, p. 15).

Non-formal education as an empowering strategy for women

In the context of development strategies non-formal education has been viewed as more relevant to the needs of the population than formal education, especially for those working in the traditional sector, who constitute 70-90 percent of the population in the Southern nations. Non-formal education was also seen as the process that usually required the participation of its recipients in determining the nature and content of the educational programs; that would always tend to focus on the needs and priorities of the communities. Finally, it was considered to be more immediately productive since the learners acquire knowledge and skills which can immediately be put into practice, thus reducing the long gestation period which exists between formal education and productive employment and thus contributing more effectively towards helping participants to meet their development needs (Fordham, 1980).

Non-formal education was then viewed by planners as a force of power to the rural poor. In the opening ceremony of the Delhi Conference Malcolm Adiseshiah observed that:

> Non-formal education . . . feeds back into our societies a rather grim and explosive power process by assisting the poor and down trodden majority of the people to organize themselves so as to end the state of injustice in which they have been forced to live. We can call this 'dialogue and action', 'conscientization', or as in India, 'redistributive justice'. No matter what term we use, non-formal education is people's power - the power to change society and make it move towards the paths of justice, tolerance, understanding and charity. (Quoted in Fordham, 1980, p. 7)

Within a few years a number of internationally supported research projects on non-formal education were carried out. In keeping with the emphasis on rural development, research priority was directed mainly towards programs aimed at increasing rural employment, productivity and income. In general, those programs were designed to improve the knowledge and skills of the farmers, rural artisans and craft workers and small entrepreneurs. The International Council for Educational Development (ICED) carried out for UNICEF and the World Bank (Coombs, 1973), the USAID sponsored Program of Studies in Non-formal Education (1973), and the regional counterparts to ILO's World Employment Program (1976) represent several of efforts to systematically examine and document aspects of the non-formal education complex during the early and mid 1970s.

Now in many Developing Countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America non-formal education has become the top priority. Since the decade of the 80s emphasis on universal education and the need to increase countries' productive population have ushered in non-formal education to supplement or compliment formal education. But the main target clientele of non-formal education programs are out-of-school youths, 'non-productive' or 'partially productive' adults, the illiterate and neo-literate and the core of these groups are women. Even though the historical development of non-formal education shows some commonalties within the geographic regions some modifications regarding the nature of programs are evident (Unesco, 1981).

During the decade of 80's it was found that the majority of the participants of non-formal education programs were women. Studies show that in the Southern nations, 70% of the enrollment was female (Fryer, 1985, CERID, 1994). So during this time the emphasis shifted from rural technology to 'basic needs' which left women out of the development processes. Jaquettee (1986) considers this shift as "male discrimination and domination of the cultural, political and economic values in society" (p.272). The demand at this time was for equal job opportunity in the agricultural credit schemes or training programs.

According to Stromquist (1988) the problem with many non-formal education programs is that they have not yet given full recognition to women's concerns in society. These programs address mainly the reproductive roles of women, that seek women to be more informed mothers, more efficient family care takers and effective home managers. The 'basic needs' approach developed recently indicate that while these programs have made progress in treating common problems affecting low-income women, they have made

scarce contributions in the treatment of these problems within a broader project of social transformation.

Some non-formal education programs that provide marketable skills to women also have been criticized as presenting two negative features, one is that they concentrate on marketable skills that do not disrupt the domestic responsibilities of women or take them away from home, thereby keeping patriarchal ideology intact (Stromquist, 1987; Patel, 1987). Another aspect is that these productive programs represent a very small proportion of the non-formal education programs. A study conducted in Africa found that less than 1% of the total budget of World Bank's educational funding was invested in the non-formal education sector (Fryer, 1985).

Stromquist (1988) makes a sharp remark on the state-run non-formal education projects for women that rarely contain the provision of supportive services assuming that the child care services are not problematic since the low-class women are believed to have extended family networks and thus have relatives to take care of their children. According to her the projects funded by UNDP and UNFPA usually make no provision for women's lack of mobility, time constraints, and child care responsibilities in their non-formal education programs.

Kelly (1987) examined past programs and observed that they concentrated on the reproductive aspects of women's lives to the exclusion of productive needs, tasks and responsibilities. These one sided programs, that is programs only for production or reproduction, have led either to skills that do not enable women to become active economic agents or they have transmitted skills that lead women to engage in economic activities that represent an additional burden in their lives.

Criticism has been directed towards the state-run non-formal education programs. Eisenstein (1984) views the welfare state subversive to patriarchy because it blurs the distinction of gender issues in public and private life. As a result, the state supports reproduction oriented non-formal education programs for women but never to a point where these are so streamlined or efficient that women may be released from reproductive responsibilities. Stromquist (1988) also argues that the emphasis of many government run programs is not to isolate women but to integrate them in development efforts on the assumption that all participants will have access to resources and will benefit equally. But on the contrary, this indiscriminate creation of male-female groups is not benefiting women. According to her as women lack formal education or have little schooling and they

belong to households with strong patriarchal relations, they remain inhibited in the presence of males, and thus only beneficiaries rather participants.

Lately the concept of empowerment was developed within provisions of non-formal education programs for women. Some feminists have strongly recommended an empowering non-formal education for women. In their opinion women have different problems and life situations than men and need special consideration while developing such programs for them. Stromquist (1988) suggests that an empowering non-formal education for women should bring the notion that individuals must be ready to take actions at all times and not only at prescribed official instances. Supporting Freire's idea of consciousness raising or development of a critical mind she argues that the realization of conditions of inequality and marginality is not enough to bring change. Empowerment in her opinion seeks to combine both consciousness-raising and participation so that individuals not only understand their society and the place they currently have in it, but that they need to undertake efforts to modify social relations. An empowering education for women according to her is the one that promotes in women cognitive, psychological and economic components. On the cognitive level she emphasizes the legal aspect; on the psychological level she stresses the transformation of the social situation and at the economic level their ability to earn and develop marketability for their products. She further recommends that program objectives should benefit women as citizens by providing supportive mechanisms and assistance to develop stronger institutions to become self sustaining.

The critics of development argue that it has ignored the consciousness raising aspect while introducing non-formal education programs for women. They contend that when women are relatively powerless and have little control over what is happening in their environment, education may have little meaning for them. What they need is an understanding of societal forces that result in women bearing so many children, working endless hours, being beaten and raped, putting up with an alcoholic husband, and going hungry. Existing non-formal education systems have not provided women with the tools to understand and analyze the true nature of social political and economic systems that govern their lives and oppress them, and this is why they have failed. If women are to be change agents in their societies, the education offered to them must be a tool for consciousness raising and action. This end result cannot be brought about by learning the three R's alone or being drilled in nutrition and family planning (Anand, 1982).

Literacy and Empowerment of Women

The fact that literacy improves the living condition of the people has been determined by many studies, as has the reality that "illiterates" have suffered most difficult lives. The World Conference on Education for All defines learning needs as the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary for people to survive, to live in dignity, to continue learning and to improve the quality of their own lives and their communities and nations. When basic learning needs are met, people are empowered to make informed decisions, respond to opportunities, adapt to change, and undertake initiatives from which they or others benefit.

It is believed that literacy helps in changing attitudes and increasing awareness among women. A key to changing the status of women is to have not only access to education, but also control over that access and the kind of education. Along this line, literacy and access to information are considered as an important aspects of empowerment for those who lack this knowledge. Beatrice Paolucci (1976) contends that:

> If persons are to have the power beyond the immediate household through decision-making that affects their well-being, they must have access to information. Access to information in large part (but not exclusively) is dependent on literacy, i.e., competence in numerical skills, reading and writing. ... Literacy is a basic competence which is essential in order to meet the demands of modern society and to participate fully in education and market activities. (quoted in Charlton, 1984, p. 160)

The experience of Nicaragua's Literacy campaign also shows that becoming literate can provide empowerment. Jo Lampert (1988) explains it as follows:

> Becoming literate is perceived as just part of a larger process of education and empowerment. Literacy teaches people who causes the war, who carries the guns. Literacy reminds people of what their struggle has been and where their strength could take them. The Nicaraguans know what we pretend not to; that education is always ideologically based. So for women, empowerment comes not only from knowing how to read and write, but from reading about and discussing their own situations as women. (p.130)

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs Canada also mentions the necessity of literacy for building self-esteem and a positive self image for women. Kim Anderson pointed out this in the following version:

> Without literacy skills, many women find themselves caught in a cycle of unemployment, unfulfilment and dependence. Literacy is a source of breaking isolation among young mothers which they often feel in modern society. (Government of Canada, 1990: p. 39)

The committee also declared that "Literacy is a tool of empowerment, self-determination and independence . . . (and) in the future it will become a necessity for survival." (p. 39)

The sense in which literacy has an empowering potential in people's lives has been described by Kassam (1989). According to him, to be literate is to gain a voice and to participate meaningfully and assertively in decisions that affect one's life and to become liberated from the constraints of dependency. He further illustrates that to be literate is to gain self confidence, become self assertive, and become politically conscious and critically aware, and to demystify social reality. . . . Literacy helps people to become self-reliant and resist exploitation and oppression, it provides access to written knowledge - and knowledge is power (p. 531). It is not clear whether Kassam thinks these consequences follow literacy as a 'functional skill', or if he sees them as a definition of the actual attainment of literacy.

However, a study in Sri Lanka contrasts with this overall discussion of the linkage between literacy, empowerment, and situation of women in a society . It questions the role of literacy in empowerment. Sri Lanka is the country with the highest literacy percentage in South Asia, but it still lags behind others in providing legal status to women. Traditional religious and cultural biases hold a particular image of women's role as a fundamental component of their world view and strongly resist attempts to change the status of women. This point has been expressed by a Sri Lankan lawyer as follows:

> In many ways, the issues of women's rights have accentuated the constant tension between tradition and modernity. Women have been classically regarded as the bearers of traditions from one generation to another. The transformation of their role in society is seen as an erosion of foundation of traditional cultures. When the alternative to tradition is westernization, there is an in-built cultural prejudice which is often the justification of the denial of equal rights for women. (Coomaraswamy 1982, quoted in Cook 1990)

Nevertheless feminist thinkers question such patriarchal values and advocate that literacy should be an instrument for empowering women whereby they should be able to overcome the suppression and get encouragement in feminist thinking. They recognize that providing education for women does not banish these barriers overnight, but it does begin the process. Kamala Bhasin (1992) stresses women's perspectives need to be developed on and apply to all areas of society because women are not a separate sector. Women's concerns, perspectives and visions are necessary on every issue - be it militarization, human rights or sustainable development, for her every issue is a women's issue.

According to her an empowering education should recognize women's contribution, and knowledge by helping women fight their own fears, and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. It should aim at enhancing their self-respect and self-dignity in society by making them economically independent and self-reliant and having control over resources like land and property as well as over their own bodies. It should also help in reducing women's burden of work, especially within the home. She emphasizes that creating and strengthening women's groups and organizations will add to women's empowerment. She further suggests that it is important to promote qualities of nurturing, caring, gentleness, not just in women but also in men to make a just society.

The kind of education for women's empowerment according to her should be a liberating education and knowledge. It ought to help to challenge patriarchal knowledge, norms, values, behaviour patterns; read and understand the word but also to read, understand and control our world; master three R's but also to be masters of their lives and makers of their destinies; acquire the necessary analytical skills to understand the fast changing realities of life; give them the confidence and strength to refuse to submit to conditions of indignity and inhumanity. Literacy classes for women according to her should become the nuclei for consciousness raising. They should help women form strong groups so that they can gain more and more control over their lives, help them break their silence, make them visible. Literacy classes she further stresses should create an atmosphere which allows women more freedom and opportunities to realize their full human potential.

Promod Parajuli and Elizabeth Enslin (1990) contend that relevant and critical literacy programs can contribute by bringing into a legitimate sphere of public debate the latent potential of the participants. A study conducted by them in Gunja Nagar, Nepal during 1987-88 shows that literacy can be a source of empowerment to the women through consciousness raising, by reclaiming their power of the past. The use of key word method and a political discourse was not only successful in creating consciousness among women but many men joined their discussions after a few confrontations in the beginning. After their study they came to the conclusion that:

- an empowering education is not one which imposes alien knowledge but one which critically regenerates the history and culture of the participants.
- an empowering education should reveal the conflicting interpretations of knowledge between dominant and subordinate groups, such as men and women, high and low castes, in the same society.

The lesson learned by this study was that, literacy provides a forum in which local memories of women's power and subordination in the past shaped the struggle for survival and identity in the present.

Summary

Literacy as a concept and a practice began with a fairly simple notion of learning to read, perhaps to write, and eventually associating those skills with being able to obtain employment and manage one's life within the existing society...a technical/functional skill needed for technical/functional economic growth in a country. Gradually it became evident that the concept and practice was linked to particular languages and to transmitting a view of social reality which often worked against the interests of the people being educated and which contributed to their domination rather than their development. Out of that arose new ideas about the nature of literacy, about its potential role in personal empowerment and social development, and in particular with respect to women about the possibility of enabling them in these areas of human capacity.

As it was also obvious that most adult literacy programs fit within the general category of non-formal education programs, the understanding of empowerment and development which developed within that sphere of knowledge was applicable to them. Here too, the literature recognized the central role of women in the field.

Literature suggests that women are politically disempowered, economically disadvantaged and socially delegitimated in many parts of the developing countries. They are legitimated only by appropriating the values bestowed upon them by the age-old practice of subordination. Women have been in constant struggle against these discriminatory practices, and the fight has been a never-ending process. From the very beginning of the century, the struggle has taken various forms, from liberalism to post-modern feminism. An empowering literacy is suggested by many feminist to overcome this situation of women throughout the globe.

Drawing from this literature, this study looks at the women from one literacy project in south-eastern Nepal, the *terai* geographic zone which borders India, but before doing so it will provide the background on education in Nepal in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Women and Education in Nepal

Introduction

Why is it that adult women in Nepal need literacy education? We must turn to the lengthy history of education in Nepal, and especially the education of women, to understand this phenomenon. Nepal remained isolated from the rest of the world for more than a century under the Rana rule. Although there were traditional schools (Buddhist and Hindu) open to the public prior to the Rana rule they were confined to the high class/caste people.[1]The contemporary formal education system was established in 1854 during the time of Janga Bahadur and was exclusively for the ruling class. The opportunity of formal schooling for the people of Nepal was made available only after its freedom from the autocratic Rana regime in 1951. The schools established after democracy were open to everyone, but women were largely left out due to prevailing prejudices against them. Only a few high class women whose families had been influenced by the outside world and who had recognized the importance of women's education found an opportunity for education.

It was only during the women's decade declared by the UN that women received special consideration and education was given first priority by the government. During and after this period the government adopted a positive discrimination policy to enhance women's education. Programs were developed in both the formal and non-formal sectors to increase women's awareness of education and to bring them in the main stream of development. In this chapter I will present an historical underpinning of the educational development for women in Nepal in both the formal and non-formal sectors.

History of Women's Education

Women's education during ancient times

During the Vedic period, the religious institutions played an important role providing education which was confined to religious purposes. Although no evidence has been traced as to whether such institutions provided education for women, some women's

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[1] Because the education at that time was in Sanskrit mainly for religious purposes so the people who were not allowed to perform the religious rituals were prohibited from such education including the women of high caste

names are presented as learned women[2] of that time. Literature shows that women were highly respected and held an important position in the society during the Vedic period. At that time there was no discrimination against women and they were allowed to observe important rituals such as Upanayan[3] implying they were free from religious taboos. Women also had access to religious knowledge and performed most of the other rituals that they were later prohibited from doing. So far there is no evidence of a particular institution that provided education to them such as the ones which existed for men. Men, especially the high caste Brahmans and Kshatriyas[4] used to go to Gurukul[5] to get education related to their professions. The Brahmans went primarily to acquire Vedic knowledge for religious purposes and the Kshatriyas went to learn statesmanship and become good warriors; the rest had no opportunity for education (Thapa, 1985).

The Gurukul system of education, with its ties to religion, continued for a long period of time in Nepal. The main goal of education at that time was to become profound in the religious preaching and the teachers were priests themselves. Education was supposed to maintain discipline of life and a particular caste, especially the Brahmans, were given responsibility for providing it. The emperors at this time had great respect towards the Gurus, or teachers, and always obeyed them.

During the Lichhivi and Malla period Buddhism was introduced in the country and along with Hinduism exerted a great impact on the people in the country. Eventually, the integration of the two religious systems, Hinduism and Buddhism, shaped the relationships between the rulers and the ruled. Education was then confined to the Brahmans among the Hindus, and to the Monks among the Buddhists. Education for the Hindus was imparted by the Hindu priests or "Pundits" in the temple or by the Gurus in their own houses. The

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[2] The names of Gargi and Maitreyi is mentioned as learned women during Vedic period in the Hindu religious scripts. But no evidence has been found whether these women attended institutions for gaining their knowledge.

[3] The sacred thread wearing ceremony, which at present is celebrated only for high caste males, Brahmans, and Kshatriyas.

[4] According to the Varnashram system the society was divided into four castes - Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. On a hierarchy the Brahmans represented the top level, the Kshatriyas the second, the Vaishyas the third and the Sudras the last. These castes were also divided by occupation: the Brahmans were given the charge of taking care of everybody and hence were not allowed to work. They had to survive on alms from the people. The Kshatriyas were the ruling class and were given a mandate for state affairs. The Vaishyas were given charge of trading while the Sudras were to serve everyone.

[5] The house of a Guru where a student stays to learn till he becomes an expert in that field.

provision of this type of education to women and occupational castes was strongly opposed by the Brahmanic system as the occupational castes were considered the untouchables. Buddhist education was delivered through Buddhist Vihars (schools) or Gompas and was well organized. Unlike Hinduism, there was no discrimination against caste and sex[6] in Buddhism for the provision of education and this was well recognized by the people. Despite their differences, both of these systems of education were supported by the rulers of this period and were mingled together. (CERID, 1989-90).

According to Bista (1992) the visit to Nepal of Shankaracharya from south India at the end of the first millennium was particularly devastating for Buddhism. His purpose of visiting the country, as Bista says, was to reestablish the Varnashram system which was diminishing due to the popularity of Buddhism. He was able to convince the king who was a Hindu to introduce Brahman priests into the Pashupati Nath temple by giving them high ritual status at the political level and also granting lands to provide them economic independence. During this time the non-Brahmanic literature was destroyed in the process and much of the cultural heritage of the Lichhivi period was lost. Buddhist Vihars (or 'schools') were in the decline and the Buddhist institutions were being over shadowed by the high caste Hindus and their rituals. "Nepal was gravitating towards the influence of the caste structure. The religion which led primitive Nepali society to the dawn of civilization lost out completely in the land of its birth." (Gnoli, 1984:19)

The condition of Hindu women deteriorated during this period due to the influence of Hindus in India and many restrictions were placed upon them. Most of the religious performances including the Upanayan ceremony for girls were abandoned. The marriage age for the girls was reduced, widow remarriage was not sanctioned and a purdah system [7] was adopted from Muslim influence. It even became taboo for women to read and study the Vedas and perform the Vedic sacrificial rituals (Alteker, 1973). The Manusmriti[8]

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[6] There was a system where women could be Bhikshunis among the Buddhists who were allowed to study in the Vihars with the male Bhikshus side by side (in English the terms nuns and monks are generally used for these terms). However, there was no such system in Hinduism where a woman could become a priest.

[7] During this time women were restricted from going in public affairs and they were supposed to cover their face in public ceremonies. Although this was strongly practiced by the ruling class women and those living in the *terai* regions, especially those of Indian origin, it was not a practice among the people from the hill and mountain regions. They always moved freely in the society, as there had been no such intervention from outside. For more detail see Altekar, 1973: Thapa, 1985.

[8] One of the Hindu code of conduct written by Manu, a learned man of that time that has no date. There are several Manus in Hindu script in different times and it is difficult to trace at what time this particular code of conduct was prescribed.

prohibits women and Sudra from learning the Vedic script which was the source of knowledge of that time. In the Manusmriti it is stated that "for women no sacramental rite is performed in the sacred texts; women who are destitute of strength and destitute of knowledge of Vedic texts are impure as falsehood itself" (quoted in Luitel, 1991, p.8).

The Manusmriti degraded women and said women had no moral values. All the religious performances, rituals and learning were exclusively prescribed only to high caste males and women were even prohibited any access to knowledge. A man without a son would have no place in heaven because after his death necessary rituals could only be performed by the son. A son was, therefore, a 'must' in the Hindu family (Kaur, 1968). A man without a son was humiliated as "aputo" and whatever material benefit he earned would not count without the birth of a son. If a man's wife(s) had daughters, a man might consequently marry quite a number of women in the hope of getting a son. The more sons a man had, the more prestige he would acquire in society. The reverse would happen if he had many daughters instead of sons. The birth of a daughter would be (and still is) a source of anxiety to parents. Kaur (1968) explains that the Indian Rajputs often exclaimed "accursed is the day when a female child is born to me" (p.7). Manusmriti provides no place for women in society except in the role of wife and mother, and states that "a woman is never free, she should be guarded by her father at the early age, by her husband during adolescence and by her son at the old age" (quoted in Luitel, 1992, p.2).

Among the Hindus, the position of women has been different in ideology than it has been in practice. The Hindu scriptures gives a high position to women as all the high positions are occupied by Goddesses: the Goddess of Power; the Goddess of Wealth; and the Goddess of Knowledge. Yet in practice, in everyday life, women are prohibited from all these sources of powers. Women are considered weak and so men are supposed to safeguard them throughout their life: as prescribed in Manusmriti, the father, the husband and the son taking care of a woman in different periods of her life. She was further prohibited from any right to property so she had to look for a man for her survival and she was also prohibited from learning the holy texts by being considered an impure being just as a Sudra. Women were considered as men's slaves and a man could do anything he desired to her. The system of Sati[9] was much in practice during this period. Women were also exploited in the name of religion, offered as deities in the temples and not permitted to

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[9] A system where women were burnt alive in the funeral pyre of their dead husband. It was a well accepted belief that by doing so, women would go to heaven and they would also bring prosperity to the family.

marry but permitted to indulge sexually with men as prostitutes. This custom still prevails in the far Western hills of Nepal.[10]

The Hindu women of Nepal were also prohibited from observing many religious performances. They could not read and study holy Hindu scriptures like the Vedas and Puranas and could not perform rituals concerning birth, marriage, death and annual Shradha.[11] Women are still considered impure[12] during certain moments in their life like the menstrual period, and during the birth of a child. Women were required to go through a purification ceremony after the birth of each child and the father along with the priest performed the rituals. Initially, mostly the Brahman and Kshatriya women went through this process but eventually other castes and groups followed them because of their association with the Brahmans. The Brahmans would be the priests who insisted on performing such rituals on other groups of people as well as their own (Kolenda, 1964).

In comparison to Hindu women, the position of Buddhist women during this time was much better in the community because the Buddhist religion was not as rigid as the Hindu religion. Among the Buddhists, there existed a custom of making a woman a Lama,[13] and she was considered no less a priest than any other male priest. Women were also allowed to study in the monastery with men. Women enjoyed sexual freedom, and their sexual morality was not an issue among the Buddhists as it was among the Hindus. They had a special marriage ceremony where a girl took part in the event at a very young age to a Subarna Kumar, the representative of the soul of her would-be husband[14] (Shrestha, Singh and Pradhan 1972). This ceremony symbolizes her freedom from the

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[10] The custom of 'keeping Devaki' still prevails in western Nepal where a girl child is offered to the Goddess at her birth. She is supposed to live in the temple throughout her life, by serving the Goddess and never marrying a human being. This custom is still in practice among the Thakuris of western Nepal although it has been prohibited by law.

[11] The annual ritual to be performed in the name of the deceased.

[12] Many orthodox people, especially from the high caste Brahman and Kshatriya family do not eat food of any kind touched by women during these periods even today. Besides, some orthodox Thakuri (a higher rank among the Kshatriyas) males in Western Nepal, to this day never eat food, especially rice and pulses cooked, by their wives. They consider women impure and it is believed that they will lose their caste if they eat rice cooked by their wives.

[13] A head priest in the monastery.

[14] In this ceremony a girl is married to a special fruit called *bel* which is kept throughout her life and she is not considered a widow as long as the fruit is safe even after the death of her husband. This ceremony is performed before menarche.

bondage of widowhood and it meant she would be free to divorce at any time she wished. If a woman wanted a divorce she would just return the *supari*[15] she was given during her marriage.[16] A woman would not be looked down upon when she married more than one husband (Kirkpatrick, 1975) so women in the Buddhist religion even practiced polyandry, a common system especially among the Ceylonese and Himalayan Buddhists (Haimendorf, 1966).

Among the Buddhists there was, and still is, a custom of keeping a virgin girl in the name of deities. It is a belief that such girls possess a strong power and no man can resist her power and eventually would die in her presence; hence these women are prohibited from marriage. Such beliefs still prevail in Kathmandu and a Kumari Goddess is still kept as a symbol of the Goddess of Power, with the custom still existing among the Sakya community in Kathmandu valley. The king of Nepal visits the Goddess to get blessings of power from her once a year, on the occasion of Indra Jatra, a festival which falls in the month of August or September in the Augustinian calendar.

Women's education from 1768 to 1950

During the period of Prithvi Narayan Shah (1768-1846) the predominant role of Hinduism and Buddhism was lost as importance was given to martial values. The educational institutions such as monasteries, Vihars and temples which imparted education lost their favour due to the negligence of the rulers. In the words of Aryal, (1966):

> Prithvi Narayan Shah, the conqueror gave education a military colour. For about half a century, after the formation of the Nepali Nation, military activities distracted the people from educational activities. Military prowess was stressed and military values became the aims to pursue. It appeared as if the ancient Spartan ideals became transplanted into the Himalayas. (p.20)

The religious education of both the Buddhist and Hindu realm that governed the way of living of the ordinary people was dominated by the authoritarian military state policy. Women who did not participate in the military were also neglected at this time. The Buddhist monasteries where the women had been getting the privilege of education became victim to the ruling powers. Quoting Levi, Upraity (1962) wrote:

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[15] A kind of nut especially used for making beetle. It is also chewed as chewing gum. Most of the men in India and Nepal chew it for fun. These nuts are also used for various religious purposes.

[16] Although it is regarded as a Buddhist system, this kind of marriage is common among the Newars of both Buddhist and Hindu origin. It can be said that both the religions compromised with the tradition that persisted among the Newars when the religions entered the Kathmandu Valley.

> Buddhism ... lost its influence and privileges. The convents and temples found themselves denuded of their properties and deprived of their accumulated donations that served as a means of subsistence. Impoverished and neglected, they deteriorated. The Buddhist Pandits were compelled to subsist on the alms of a community, reduced to indigence, and stopped recruiting and instructing students. (pp. 29-30)

During this time while military education was given more emphasis the ancient forms of education lost their value. Religion, education and social customs became subordinate in the role they played in the society. Even then, this period is credited for creating the infrastructure of a large Nepali society and eventually developing Nepali as a national language (CERID, 1989-90).

With the rise of the Ranas from the reign of Surendra Vikram Shah, to the establishment of democracy (1846-1950), the country experienced authoritarian family rule. This period is known as the period of opposition to the expansion of education in the history of Nepal. The Ranas were totally against the education of the public on the assumption that enlightened people might revolt against their rule. Nevetheless it was during this period that the modern system of education was introduced in the country. The first Rana prime minister, Janga Bahadur set up the first English school in Kathmandu, in 1853, to educate his own family members. Later on, his successor Ranodhip Singh moved the school from the palace and opened it to the general public. However, it was usually the children of Rana families, and children from the high class who got admission to this school which was then only for boys.[17] Even the girls of the Rana family did not attend any school at that time. The education in the school was based on the British model and its aim was to bring to the students political awareness, democratic ideals and other outside knowledge. Despite their strict control in education, English schools became popular in the society (CERID, 1989-90; Thapa, 1985).

The curriculum in this school was derived from the English model and included courses in English, mathematics, history and geography. The history and geography of that period was confined to the British Isles and India and included nothing about Nepal. The graduates from such schools were highly valued and absorbed into various important positions. The Ranas also opened another school which was called the Bhasa Pathshala, and where the language of instruction was in Nepali for the general public. The main aim

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[17] Personal conversation with Dr. T.N. Upraity revealed that a few women were enrolled in the palace school during the 40s and they all belonged the high class family.

of this school was to train the students in clerical skills so they could work in the Rana administration and support the high officials, who were the product of the Palace school (Bista, 1992). Apart from these schools, Padma Shamsher introduced Basic Education schools, which were mainly craft centered for the general public in 1947, to maintain balance with the English education which was considered to be a threat to the Rana's autocratic regime. The Basic Schools were set up mainly in the rural areas, with the intention of rural development, by providing training in craftsmanship such as spinning, weaving, wood working, and agriculture. In addition to the craft education, the students were taught Nepali and English languages, arithmetic, social studies, physical education, village improvement and so on (CERID, 1989-90; Bista, 1992).

Although there were no restrictions limiting women from studying in the schools mentioned above, their participation was rare due mainly to the low importance placed on women's education in society. There was no specific planning for women's education at the government level and various social evils governed their lives. Customs such as polygamy, unequal marriage, and witchcraft prevailed in society and continued throughout the Rana period. In fact polygamy and unequal marriage rather gained momentum during this period as the Ranas themselves kept several women in their palaces for their own enjoyment. Rana (1975) states that the ruling class of Ranas always considered their wives as " nothing but a child-bearing machine and suppressed their wives so much that they were 'just like dummies' ...(with) almost no right even in their domestic affairs. They even had to become 'a silent spectator' when their husbands made the most horrible sex crime in their presence" (p.61).

Some of the Ranas were in favour of women's education and made arrangements for the Sanskrit Pandits to educate their women in their own palaces. They were not sent to the school as the Ranas themselves had imported strict purdah from India for their women. The Ranas also had made provision to provide education for the girls who entered as concubines in their palaces. These girls were given training on subjects such as, music, dance, sewing, knitting etc. Women were a source of enjoyment and luxury for the high class Rana family. (Dixit, 1974).

As women were deprived of education and economic rights,[18] they were confined to agricultural or household works. Divorce was sanctioned for women in the case of an

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[18] According to the law of Nepal, sons are only allowed to inherit parental property. Daughters are given this right only in a case in which there is no son.

impotent husband but this was confined to the law books as it was never practiced. The Ranas themselves were reluctant to administer these laws if the case occurred in their own family (Thapa, 1985). The socio-cultural values enforced on women were so rigid that they could hardly even look outside their household. Educating a woman was regarded as threatening the age old traditions. A famous Nepali poet even composed poems that taught a daughter-in-law to be benevolent, submissive and responsible for all the household duties. In his opinion a good woman "should never laugh, only the prostitutes laugh; and by doing so they will spoil all their household works." According to him women should not sit idle; such women bring misfortune to the family. Such ideals were made popular by reciting them during religious occasions and in the homes of educated Brahmans.[19] Women from high caste Hindu groups were the victims of such ideals and were strongly guided by the traditional moral values. Rana (1975) mentions that Hindu women had really a hard life during this time.

During the first decade of this century, some of the women started programs to make women aware of the situation of the country and women by providing them with literacy and skill training programs. Dibya Koirala the mother of late B.P. Koirala,[20] had been influenced by the Indian National movement and Gandhi's Swadeshi Movement while in exile with her husband. She started a literacy and skill training program on how to spin thread with Charkha[21] and make clothes from hand looms. Another purpose of this program was to make women conscious of their political situation in the country. They had already started a women's association in the year 1917 called Mahila Samiti in Siraha district at that time.[22]

Although a few efforts had been made to provide education for Nepalese women, modern education for women was introduced only during the 1940s. In spite of the strong

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[19] Bhanubhakta Acharya, one of the renowned poet of Nepali literature, who was a Brahman himself is considered as the first poet of modern Nepali literature. He is famous for his book called "teachings to the daughter-in-law" which talks about the best traits in a daughter-in-law that emphasizes on the most treacherous traditional role for women.

[20] B.P. Koirala was the first elected prime minister of the democratic Nepal after the Ranas were overthrown. He was overthrown by King Mahendra in a military coup in 1960. He was released after eight years of imprisonment due to health reasons. His father Krishna Prasad Koirala was an insurrectionist leader at the time of the Ranas and was exiled for his life. His family as a whole was involved in the freedom movement of Nepal during the Rana regime.

[21] A spinning wheel operated by hand to make thread out of cotton.

[22] Dibya Koirala herself was the secretary of this Samiti.

social customs against women's education at that time, a few women who were educated in India, tried to establish girls school in Nepal during the Rana period when most of the people including the men were deprived of education. The woman who established the first school for women was Chandrakanta Malla[23] in 1933 in Kathmandu valley. In the beginning she had a hard time finding students and getting the government's consent. But her devotion and zeal to bring consciousness among women through education helped to achieve success in spite of all the difficulties (Gautam, 1980).

After Chandra Kanta Malla's venture to open a girl's school in the valley, some other schools opened their doors to girls. Shantinikunj High school was the first school to begin co-education to meet public demand when a separate school for girls was not possible due to economic constraints. Contrary to the thinking of many policy makers and guardians who were against co-education for girls at the secondary level, the school achieved a great success in Nepal (Pradhan, 1950).

During 1945 to 1950, many steps were taken for the development of women's education in Nepal. Women who were educated in India and were conscious of women's condition in the country demanded far more educational opportunities for girls and tried to draw the attention of the rulers of that time (Kumari Sani, 1947). Some men who were in favour of changing the prevailing drudgery among women supported them in their struggle. In the year 1948 a few girls' schools were opened in Kathmandu valley, the Padma Kannya Vidya Pith in Kathmandu district and Kannya Niketan at Lalitpur followed by Shanti-Niketan and Shree Sitaram Padma Vidyashram. In the same year another girl's training school, the Gram Sevika Vidyalaya, which aimed at providing cottage industrial skill for women was opened at Manohara, Bhaktapur. (Thapa, 1985).

There were quite a few women writers at this time who published their articles in the popular magazines like Sharada and Gorkhapatra. Some of the popular names during those days were: Lokpriya Devi, Rajeswori Thapa, Goma, Indrani, Lok Kumari Devi, Budha Mohan Devi, Kusum Modini, Krishna Kumari, Bhakti Devi, Netra Kumari, Miss Madhadhara etc. Most of these women wrote articles or poems to make Nepalese women conscious about the present situation. Some of them also emphasized the importance of women's education to bring change in their traditional situation (Thapa, 1985). However, all their efforts could not bring much progress to the condition of women as the

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[23] Chandrakanta Malla is the sister of Sukra Raj Shastri, one of the martyrs during the Rana regime.

government itself was reluctant to develop education and the women's voices could not reach most of the population due to illiteracy.

Women's education from 1951 - 1970

The momentum towards educational development for both men and women took place only after the revolution of 1950, when the country achieved freedom from the autocratic Rana regime. People began to establish schools on their own accord in various parts of the country and sent their children including girls to school. However, only children whose parents were literate and knew the value of education were sent to school. Only a few girls were attending the school in comparison to boys because of the low value which had been placed on women's education in the society. Due to lack of financial support a separate girls' school was not possible and parents hesitated to send their daughters to a co-educational institution. In most parts of the country people established co-educational schools with their own money, but girls' participation was very low. Only educated parents sent their daughters to those schools. Most of the schools were located in the urban areas where student enrollment would be high. So people from the urban areas were the only ones who benefited from these schools (Bhakta, Dayaram, 1950).

Nevertheless some headway regarding the education of women was made during this period. Girls' schools were opened in different parts of the country and during the 1960s the number of girls' high schools reached seven. The first college for higher education for girls, Padma Kannya College was established in Kathmandu in the year 1952. A separate school for adult women who desired to continue education - Arunodaya Mahila Vidyalaya - was opened in 1953 in the Kathmandu valley. This school was opened with the initiative of women themselves and was run completely by women. By 1960, women had already obtained a chance of access to higher education up to graduate level. In the year 1960, three girl students successfully completed the B.A. and four the B.Ed. examination (Gorkhapatra, 1953 & 1960).

During 1958, a Nursing Training school was established with the collaboration of international agencies like WHO and Ford Foundation of the USA. Another job oriented program for village women was provided through Tribhuvan University Village Development Program with the collaboration of Ford Foundation in the area of home economics. A Home Science Training Centre[24] was opened at Kathmandu and the village

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[24] This training centre was called a Women's Training Centre during the Panchayat (government) period and continues by the same name. The areas of training are the same as before with some modifications of

women from different parts of the country were brought and trained in modern home economics and then sent back to their respective villages.

> Until the year 1960 there was no woman occupying the position of gazetted officer in the government, although quite a few of them were in the government services. There were six women holding second and third class gazetted officer position in the educational sector. According to a ministerial information pamphlet the number of women employees in government services, including the gazetted officers, was three hundred and eighty-three. The number of women who received higher education (more than class 10) up to 1958 was only seventy one throughout the country (Thapa, 1985: p. 99).

After 1950, and until 1970 there was rapid expansion of education in the country. As a result the number of primary schools increased from 321 to 7,256 ; the number of secondary schools increased from 11 to 1,065; and the number of higher educational institutions increased from 2 to 49 simultaneously from 1950 to 1970 (MOEC, 1971). With the increase of educational institutions, the administrative system was also restructured by creating the Ministry of Education at the central level and Inspectorates and school managing committees at the local levels. In 1953, a National Education Board was established for the first time, and with its help a 56 member National Planning Commission was formed representing people of various walks of life. After an intensive year of work (1954-55) this commission drafted a long range comprehensive plan of education. The main goals were:

1. Universal primary education by 1985.
2. Availability of adult education to all who desired it by 1965.
3. A national university by 1965, and
4. Availability of multi-purpose secondary education on the basis of one school for every 10,000 inhabitants by 1975.

The commission set out a detailed sketch for education at the primary, secondary, and university level. It also designed curricula for technical and adult education, for teacher training, and developed instructional materials. It provided necessary guidelines for administration and supervision; and financing of education. The report of this commission

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program to match local needs and interest. Skills such as kitchen gardening, child care and some on home management were introduced more recently.

provided the basis for all subsequent educational planning, including the education sectors of the Five-Year Plan (1956-61) and the three year plan (1962-65) for economic development in Nepal. The plan was submitted to the Unesco for participation in the Asian education project. (MOEC, 1971)

Due to political instability in the country, the plan formulated by the US mission could not be implemented. The same plan was revised by the mission after a few years. In a report (1965) W.B. Wood wrote:

> These suggestions have not yet been implemented, and educational planning today tends to be sporadic, sometimes opportunistic, and occasionally nonexistent. Much of the planning and administration of education is carried out on the basis of day to day operational decisions by staff officers without the benefit of advising and policy making bodies. (p.18)

In the year 1955, Nepal National Education Planning Commission recommended the vocationalization of education at the secondary level which was implemented only in 1961 and vocational subjects were introduced in four of the secondary schools on a trial basis with plans to expand in a phased in pattern. By 1970, the number of such schools had reached twenty-nine and many more were to follow. This was the beginning of the implementation of a new education system in the country which would put more emphasis on vocational education with the aim of producing the manpower required in the country. Women's education had not been given a special focus up to this time.

Women's education from 1971 onwards

The National Education System Plan (NESP) which aimed at producing the technical manpower needed for the country, was implemented in the year 1971. Curriculum and text books were revised and teachers were trained. Education was systematized and the government took the total financial as well as administrative responsibility. The previous vocationalization of education scheme was overtaken by the NESP, and the main objectives as stated in the plan (1971-76) were as follows:

a) Primary education: grade 1 to 3 - provide literacy

b) Lower secondary education: 4 to 7 - character building

c) Secondary education: 8 to 10 - skilled workers by imparting vocational training

d) First level of higher education: certificate level - low-level technical manpower

e) The second level of higher education: middle-level technical manpower

f) The third level of higher education: high-level technical manpower. (NESP, 1971)

There was no special provision for women in the New Education System Plan even though female literacy was very low. Primary education was made free and English was introduced at grade four. At the same time, primary level which had been up to the grade five was reduced to grade three. The structure with only three years of primary education was to provide at least basic level education facilities to the maximum number of people at minimum cost. It was assumed that the students would acquire basic reading writing and arithmetic skills at this level. It was also assumed that girls' enrollment would increase at least at the primary level due to free primary education.

The NESP, among other things, had sought to broaden the scope of vocational education at the secondary school level and technical educational at the tertiary level. At the school level the students were introduced to the world of work right from the primary school stage with some agricultural skills which were introduced in the curriculum itself. This exercise was continued through the lower secondary classes (IV to VII) where it was described as pre-vocational education. Coming to the secondary level (grade VIII to X), vocational education was given considerable weight.

In addition to this, a separate vocational branch was started where two hundred marks of optional vocational education was prescribed. The idea was that those who completed secondary school would enter into the job market right away and be able to fulfill the basic level manpower needs of the country. The vocational subjects introduced in NESP were:

- Agriculture: agronomy, horticulture, poultry, animal husbandry, diary science, and fishery.
- Industrial Education: electrical installation, furniture and cabinet making, metal work, building construction and bamboo work.
- Business Education: short-hand and typing, accounting and office management.
- Home Science: clothing and knitting, food and nutrition.
- Education: teacher education

The curriculum was revised and text-books were prepared on the basis of required needs. Teacher training centres were established to train the teachers. District Education Offices (DEO) were created in each district to look after the school affairs. In general three kinds of schools were sanctioned by the government in the country during NESP. They were:

1. Government schools - financed and run by the government.
2. Public schools - financed partly by government grants and partly by fees, private contribution or levies.
3. Private schools - established and run by private individuals or religious missions that get no government grants (only a few such schools were existing in the country during this period).

Even though the plan spelled out the provision of three kinds of schools the government totally restricted the establishment of the private schools. The plan (1971-76) mentioned the following criteria for the private schools:

> There will, from now on, be no schools except those that operate according to the National Education System. If a private school is certified by His Majesty's Government as capable of running in the form of a viable institution, it may be permitted to remain in the field for a fixed period of time under the full direction and control of His Majesty's Government. If any mission wants to assist schools with its teachers, it will be required to extend such assistance to the Education Ministry of His Majesty's Government. The latter will then depute them to schools. (p.48)

All the schools were standardized throughout the country with the same curriculum, teaching technique and same language. The language of instruction was obviously Nepali which was the national language. All the schools, no matter private or public had to follow the government's prescribed instructions and curriculum. Some of the private mission schools operating at that time were also merged into the government system.

There were fixed criteria for satisfactory levels of students enrollment at each level; 64% of the total primary school age children were supposed to enroll at primary level; 40% of primary school enrollment was to enroll at the lower secondary level; 50% of lower secondary school enrollment was to enroll at secondary level; and 19% of secondary school enrollment was to continue to higher education (NESP 1971-76). The SLC (school leaving certificate at the end of class 10) pass result was about 30 to 40% of pupils during this period and pupils in the schools in remote areas, and the poor, suffered the most

because of the unavailability of teachers, not enough time to study, and the unavailability of educational materials. This poor quality of education made the poor rural people even more marginalized and de facto limited their schooling to primary level. Although the 1971 Census Report showed only 3.6% literacy among women, there was no specific program for girls in the schools until this period.

Women's education received priority only after the United Nations declaration of the Women's Year in the year 1975. After then various programs both in the formal and non-formal sectors were implemented and the Government, Non- Government, and International Non-Government agencies were involved to enhance girl's and women's education in the country. The table below presents a picture of the government's programs for women in both the formal and non-formal sectors after 1975.

Table 1

Government Programs and Their Aims

Program	Aim
1. Equal Access of girls and Women to Education Program - 1976	Training for women teachers as primary teachers hence increase girls' enrollment in primary level
2. Chelibeti Program for out-of-school girls Far Western Development Region - 1984	Literacy program for girls of 8-16 years of age for 2 hours a day for 9 months
3. Education of Girls and Women - 1975	Including the above(No. 1) program, stipend of Rs 25 a month to 5% of the total number of girls and Rs 200 per year to 5% of the total number of girls in primary school
4. Shiksha Sadan Education Program for both boys and girls - 1987	Educational opportunity to out-of-school children up to grade 3 and ultimately enable them to join the formal school system
5. Women's Non-formal Education Program - 1985 as basic needs program	Providing some kind of literacy to 88, 500 adults (15 and above) girls and women by the year 2000

All the above programs aim to increase the female literacy rate in the country through both the formal and non-formal channels. While the women's non-formal educational program has focused on the adult women from the 15 to 45 age group, the Chelibeti program has focused on the out-of-school girls from age 8-14, who would have either dropped out of school or would never have been to school. The main aim of this program is to provide a second chance for schooling to those girls who drop out. It provides primary level education and those who still wish to continue their education can enter the formal system at any level according to their ability.

From the year 1975 on, with the assistance of Unesco, the government adopted a policy of positive discrimination and each Five Year Plan after that made provisions to facilitate girls' education. The Fifth Plan (1975-80) proposed to recruit women teachers in all primary schools so as to increase girl's enrollment; the Sixth Plan (1980-85) made special provision for educational opportunity to women belonging to the educationally deprived areas and communities and hence to involve them in the development process; the Seventh Plan (1985-90) adopted various schemes to increase girl's enrollment in the schools, admitting girls to feeder hostels[25] in remote areas, training women teachers and providing part time primary educational opportunities to the girls and women who had never been to school.

In 1977 the school text-books were revised to include aspects relating to popularizing girl's and women's education. The Seventh Plan included education in its basic needs program and set a national target of universalizing primary education by the year 2000, and a series of programs such as provision of scholarships, uniforms and non-formal education programs for girls and women were designed with an aim to improving women's education.

Since 1975 both formal and non-formal channels have been used to enhance women's education. In the year 1983 a separate Women's Education Section was established in the Ministry of Education (MOE) to enhance girls' and women's education. The MOE itself has a separate Adult Education Section which sets curriculum, prepares educational materials, and runs adult education programs for both men and women in the

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[25] These hostels are established to provide a residential facility for the girls who are taken for the upgrading teacher's training program. Girls who have passed grade eight are recruited and given the opportunity of schooling in the same class with local students up to grade ten. These girls are then taken into the B level teacher training program. Up to now, there are 14 feeder schools in 14 different districts of the country (CERID, 1989-90).

country. Apart from these programs, the NGO's and INGO's are also active in running different programs for women. At the same time the Women Service Coordination Committee was established to prepare plans, policies and programs to benefit girls and women in different areas especially in the non-formal sector. The programs launched for women during the decade of 70s and onward were many

Contemporary Women's Education Programs

Education programs in the formal sector

Most of the programs for women in the formal sector are undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC). In the year 1971 the "Equal Access of Women to Education Project" was launched with a view to increase girl's enrollment in the primary schools by increasing the number of female teachers with the assistantship of UNICEF/Unesco. Originally this program included two courses for preparing teachers, entitled A Level and B Level. Both the courses were of ten month's duration. The A Level program was for those girls who passed the School Leaving Certificate (SLC.) examination and the B Level program was for those girls who were under the SLC. level.

In 1977 the A Level program was terminated as it overlapped with the Intermediate Education program of the Institute of Education, Tribhuvan University. The minimum academic standard required for the B Level course was an eighth grade pass. However, due to the lack of availability of girls from remote areas, girls who were below the eighth standard were taken for training. This created academic degradation in classroom instruction so an upgrading program was started in the year 1975. The aim of this program was to improve the academic level of girls from remote areas. To facilitate the training program, Feeder Hostels were built with the assistantship of UNESCO, NORAD and HMG in 1976. Until now altogether, 14 Feeder Hostels have been established in different parts of the country and each hostel has a capacity of accommodating 20 girls. The curriculum for this program is the same as that of HMG/MOEC for general schools. These girls are then placed in the same classroom with the local students. After the completion of the grade 10 course, they are taken in for the B level teacher's training program and recruited as teachers in their own village (OWEP Report, 1991).

In 1983, under the agreement between HMG/N and UNICEF, this project was extended with certain modifications for another 15 years which was to be implemented in three phases. Since then the project has been renamed "Education of Girls and Women in Nepal". The policy matters of this program were determined by the MOEC and for the

purpose of running the program, the Office of the Women's Education Project (OWEP), was set up at the MOEC. The Institute of Education was responsible for preparing the curriculum, training and conducting internal and external examinations. UNICEF assisted in planning and programming and financing and NORAD provided technical and also financial assistance for construct and repairment work (OWEP report 1991).

During 1984, two different programs, the Local School Scholarship Program and non-formal education program were included under this project. Under the Local School Scholarship Program, financial assistance was provided to the school-going rural girls from backward groups (or disadvantaged groups) of the society and a monthly scholarship ranging from Rs.60 to Rs.100 was awarded to the high school girls on a quota basis. A scholarship program was also started for primary school girls in the year 1985 which was less than that of the high school girls. Since the year 1987, the scholarship program for the primary school girls has been amalgamated with the primary school scholarship and uniform distribution program under the Basic Needs fulfillment program. Under this program, scholarships were provided to 5% of the total number of girls enrolled at the primary level and a sum of Rs. 200 was provided to buy school uniforms to another 5% of the girls at that level. In the year 1987/88 this program was launched in 10 districts with the aim to include 5 districts each year. The main purpose of these incentives are to increase girls enrollment at the primary level (OWEP Report, 1991).

Education programs for women in the non-formal sector

The non-formal education programs are undertaken by Government, non-Government, and International non-Government organizations. Although the Women Service National Coordination Committee(WSNCC) was established to coordinate programs in the non-government sector most of them work independently. Most of their programs focus on literacy, skill training and awareness raising programs. Though they all use the materials prepared by MOEC in their basic literacy program, some of them also use their own literacy materials.

The non-formal education program which was known by the name of "Adult Education Program", in Nepal was started in 1951 to increase literacy percentage, which was only 2% at that time. This program was meant for both illiterate men and women and Women's Organizations were activated especially to run programs for women. In the beginning, a three-month package to provide the knowledge of reading writing and arithmetic was developed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and a five year adult education program was started in the fiscal year 1951/52. With the introduction of Five-

Year Development Plans in 1956, the Adult Education Program was explicitly considered as part of the national plan with fixed targets each year. Till the year 1963, this program was designed as a three months short course only to impart literacy, and there was only one primer "Praudh Shiksha Praveshika." After 1965 it was revised and some functional contents such as agriculture, health, personal hygiene and community life were included. The program was renamed the "Functional Adult Literacy Program" and was tied up with the extension programs of each department of HMG/N. Most of them used the same materials produced by Adult Education Section of MOE some of them also added the contents in their area of work (CERID, 1994).

During the 1970's education was recognized as the cornerstone of development and non-formal education programs were implemented by a number of Integrated Rural Development Projects. The government line agencies were also activated to run non-formal education programs in their project areas. Some of the projects that have a major focus on women are Production Credit for Rural Women under the Ministry of local Development and Small Farmers Development Project under the Agriculture Development Bank. Both of the projects provide training for women in local skills and provide loans to start their own business, with literacy as the entry point to their programs.

Apart from the above programs, various NGOs and INGOs were activated to develop programs to increase literacy. But due to the lack of clear cut plans and policies, of well defined objectives, and of follow-up programs for the neo-literates, the program could not achieve the success as targeted (Pant, 1993). Although women were the beneficiaries of most of the programs, they were neglected in formulating the policies. To overcome this lacunae, since 1980, an important policy measure was adopted where the learner's needs were to be considered in developing the materials. A set of materials was produced for raising the productivity level of the adult participants according to their needs. Subsequently, the NFE (non-formal education) programs conducted by different organizations vary by clientele and operate to meet their own goals. The NFE focus during this period can be categorized under the following headings:

- literacy programs;
- programs focusing on new productive skills;
- awareness raising programs on health, sanitation, environmental conservation and community development; and
- literacy as a starting point for community development. (CERID, 1994, p. 23)

Most of the programs that address women have a focus on agriculture, nutrition, family planning, health and child care. The awareness raising program in the literacy program, focuses on making a good housewife, a better income maker, an agricultural holder, and a skillful mother (CERID, 1994).

Various agencies have been involved in delivering literacy programs for women in Nepal since 1950 and the thrust has been changing according to the UN mandate. During the first phase (1950 - 1964) the emphasis was to provide fundamental education, with functional literacy without numeracy; during the second phase (1965 - 1974) the idea of functional literacy was tied to economic development (influenced by Harbison's Human resource Development theory) and hence literacy and skill training programs were given together. After 1975 the emphasis of the adult literacy program had been much influenced by Freire's "conscientization" approach and emphasis was given to awareness raising programs and both the functionalist/ technocratic and critical paradigms have been in practice. Since then literacy programs have incorporated all three aspects: functional literacy, skill training and awareness raising. The pedagogical process encourages dialogues and discussions.

During the 1980s and onwards adult literacy programs continued with a specific focus on raising the awareness level, productivity, knowledge, and self reliance to meet various economic and social needs of the participants. A multitude of social and economic development agencies both in the government and non government sectors have supported these programs (Lamichhane, 1992).

The decade of the 80's can be considered as important from the point of view of expansion and diversity of NFE programs in Nepal. Some of the programs that have special focus on women include the education for rural development project, the non-formal education program of the Ministry of Education, the Basic Needs approach, the non-formal education programs of NGOs and INGOs, the development of literacy materials for non-formal education programs.

Summary:

Although an educational system has existed in Nepal since ancient times, it was only for the high caste males. The modern system of education was introduced in the middle of the 19th century but was confined to ruling class males. The general public were able to access education only after the overthrow of the age-old family rule of the Ranas in 1950 . But even then education for women could not make headway due to the existing

socio-cultural bias and the values against women's education. This situation was also due to the economic constraints which made it difficult or impossible to provide educational opportunity to the maximum number of the people. The government also made little effort to enhance women's education until 1970 despite the fact only a few girls were attending schools at that time.

Women's education gained momentum in Nepal only after 1975 when the UN declared International Women's Year. Programs were made in both formal and non-formal sectors to enhance women's education as there was more than 95% illiteracy among women at that time. After this the government developed educational policies with a special focus on women, with funding from the United Nations. Various programs were also developed and both the formal and non-formal channels were activated to enhance women's education. The government took total responsibility in the formal sectors while the government, non-government and international non-governmental organizations were involved in imparting education to women in the non-formal sectors. Although efforts have been made to enroll the maximum number of girls in schools, their enrollment is still not on parity with that of boys. The non-formal education programs appear to have been popular among women as their participation in these programs is much higher than that of men. Despite an effort of almost two decades Nepal still lags behind achieving equality of educational opportunities for women, and this inequality is clearly reflected in the continued need for, and development of, adult education and literacy programs, as well as the lack of education and litracy among the women who become the subject of this work in the terai of Eastern Nepal.

Chapter 4

Research Context and Methodology

The Context

Literature on the status of women shows that women are socially constructed as domestic and that they are powerless and helpless in many areas of their lives. Acceptance of the "taken for granted " view of the world which legitimizes their powerlessness is the fate for them. Efforts to empower them through literacy offer new hope although some liberative feminists see the danger of these programs being merely functional literacy for domesticating women and keeping them within the four walls of the household. Despite this danger, all agree upon the importance of literacy to liberate women from household drudgery and contribute to their empowerment for social transformation.

Literacy programs for women in Nepal were initiated during the 1950's, with the simple goal of enabling women to read and write. Following the history of literacy in development as described in the last chapter, functional contents were added in the late 60's and in the mid 70's literacy primers were designed to ensure critical awareness among the target groups (both men and women). These primers are extensively used at present and in contemporary literacy programs 75% of the participants are women. An earlier study conducted by Lamichhane (1992) on the problems and prospects of non-formal adult education (NFE) programs in Nepal gives an overview of these programs in Nepal but provides no specific focus on women. With this in mind, my research was intended to focus on those women who had participated in a literacy program and to address their literary experiences in relation to their own empowerment.

The situation analysis of UNICEF in 1991 reveals that the condition of women in Nepal has not changed much over time, but there have been and continue to be active women's literacy projects aimed at empowering women. That is, in every development project literacy is linked to the aim to make women aware of their situation and make them independent economically, socially, and psychologically, which is the definition used for "empowering women". Literacy in this context becomes a medium for providing knowledge to women as a means of empowerment and often the phrase "Knowledge is the source of empowerment" is used to describe or justify these programs.

My research interest was focused on those women who had participated in one of these literacy projects and I sought to find out the definitions or meaning of empowerment

given by the women as a result of their participation in it, and whether they perceived themselves as empowered through the literacy program. Here, I wanted to have those women describe their life circumstances and changes which have occurred in their lives which may be attributed to, or associated with, their experience in literacy activities. In this context I had some questions in my mind : "What does empowerment mean to women? What empowering knowledge is required for women in the Nepalese context? Is literacy a source of empowerment to women? If so, how does literacy empower women?"

A Reflection on Personal Experiences

Apart from the literature my idea of women's empowerment has been guided by my own experience of being a woman in Nepal. It would be pertinent here to relate my own story. When I was married, I found myself trapped in a situation where my boundary was limited to the four walls of the *ghar*,[1] the household of my husband's family. I felt every step of mine was watched and guided by the other females of the household. I was so self-conscious that I used to think twice before doing anything. In the beginning it was okay because I was new to that family and I thought I needed guidance, but it became a daily routine which I at times found very difficult to bear. I could not understand what was wrong with me that so much attention was paid to my actions, and many times wanted to react but I was always aware that it might create tension in the family. At this point I always remembered the verse which is mostly cited at the time of marriage:

> *Bolnu namra bhayera dwesh nalinu kohi hawas ta pani*
> *Batse yad rahos bhai kula badhu yahi parchha garnu bhani/*
> You should learn to speak politely; and never let your ego rule at any time. This is what the daughter-in-law who is from a respectable family needs to do.

My concept of being a woman was not only determined by my adaptation to the ghar and the expectations of my husband's family, but the image of women in the total cultural context. To conform or follow the tradition of the family was the principle of all teachings given at the time of marriage so that one may not break the relationship established between the two families. Not conforming, not following these expectations, would also reflect on the reputation of my parental family. Before taking any step, I was always conscious of the consequences that might follow and the teaching given by the words of the above verse.

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[1] A ghar is the home of husband after marriage.

Time passed by and I gave birth to two daughters. Quite often I heard the gossip around the household and outside that I was not able to give birth to a son and by implication I was worthless. I had to give birth to a son in order to be given full acceptance in the family. I was not sure how many births I had to give to have a son and it made me tired thinking about that.

I resisted a lot and remembered my life at my *maiti,* [2] my parent's household. I was the youngest daughter in the family and loved by all. I never felt myself different from my brothers in any respect; this was reflected in my equal chance for education and the fact I had acquired a university degree at the master's level. I never had thought that I would have to marry and go to another's house one day, but when I was of marriageable age I was married according to the desire of my family and following the custom of marriage to a partner who the family thought best. Marriage is a must for a woman, they said, regardless of my education and independence.

Many times I thought "if only I could work outside the household" but I could not express my feelings because I thought it would be against the family norms to allow a daughter-in-law to work outside the home; especially in this case where even my husband did not hold a paid job outside the family properties. Being the *Jamindars* and economically sound it was not acceptable in the family to allow a daughter-in-law to work outside the household. One of my sisters-in-law, my husband's younger sister, was teaching in a school which gave me some hope; perhaps I could do that too. But a daughter and daughter-in-law do not hold the same position in the household. A daughter in the household is thought of as a guest for a period of time until she goes to her husband's home; she enjoys full liberty in her parent's place. In contrast, as the elder daughter-in-law, I was responsible for the total family reputation and could not act against the will of my elders in the family. This thought would bring me to the position of helplessness, and hopelessness.

I found myself struggling in between the two values: one that of being a daughter-in-law that guided me to be *namra* [3] and follow the family tradition and the other part, my inner "self" with the ego of an educated person, wanting to be independent and get rid of

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[2] A Maiti is the parents' house, the house of a woman where she is born.

[3] Namra means politeness. It is an expected quality in a woman especially after marriage, as described in the verse above.

the values that blocked my way. My master's degree seemed to ridicule me, having no meaning at all. As Bista (1992) says:

> In an orthodox Hindu family a daughter-in-law's prime concern would be to please her in-laws and be profound in the household chores and she is socialized in the same manner at her natal place. Such qualities do not necessarily need an educational background. (p. 63)

I assumed that the family members should understand my condition and should give me an opportunity to use my intellectual capability; in this case it felt as if I was an "outsider" and was alone in my struggle. Apart from that I did not like to bring any conflict to the family by bringing my problem to them (at least, I assumed my wishes and desires to be a problem).

Many times I expressed my desire to work outside the home to my husband but he would not agree because I had little children. One day, much to my surprise, he came with an employment form and told me that if I were lucky enough to get this job, I could work. But the job was in Kathmandu which was a 12 hours journey from home by bus which would mean I would have to stay away from home, and I could not believe that would happen. Nevertheless I filled in the application form and sent it to the University.

I had to go to Kathmandu to write an exam and again to have an interview. I succeeded at both and obtained an appointment. Once all this was accomplished, it was very difficult to decide to move alone with my small children.[4] Finally it was all settled by my husband and I made my journey to my place of residence and work in Kathmandu. It seemed to be impossible that I was settled so easily; it was incredible. Now most of the time I live on my own in Kathmandu with the children and nobody in my family interferes in my decisions. More than that, quite often they take my suggestions.

Had I remained silent, perhaps, I would have continued to live in the same situation for ever, blaming the others around me. Although the economic status of both my parents (which enabled me to become well educated) and my husband's family was much higher than most in Nepal, many women in such families were unable to find independence. But had I not been educated, would I have had an opportunity to come out of that situation? Could I have done anything that would help me to find some solution? Would I have

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4. My son was just born then, and my husband could not leave because he was the elder son of the family and the parents would not let him go as he had to look after the family affairs.

thought of being liberated in this respect? (I thought I was powerless and could do nothing on my own). What is the main force that drove me from suppression (within me) to liberation? To quote Sleeter (1991) here:

> Those involved in empowerment must help people recognize and learn to use various power bases, as both individuals and collectives. This requires first rejecting the idea of powerlessness, which both conservative and radical educators have tended to hold, although for different reasons. (p.15)

Giroux(1983) puts it this way:

> Too often, as I have pointed out, radical theories have portrayed the use of power in schools in strictly negative and one-dimension terms. This not only distorts the reality of schools; it ends up being a more 'radical' version of management ideology which sees human beings as infinitely malleable. Power in the service of domination is NEVER as total as this image suggests. (p.199)

Based on my experience, I find myself believing that the state of personal powerlessness is not only due to the effect of domination and suppression but also to one's own interpretation of the situation and the values that govern one's own behaviour and actions. Reflecting on my story, in my research I would like to see whether literacy (or in some way literacy programs) have, through a process of empowerment helped women to address the problems they encounter in day to day life.

At this point, although my overall research questions as stated above remained focused on the meaning of empowerment for women, I added the following specific research questions to address in the field:

1. What meaning do women give to being empowered as a result of their being literate?

2. Has literacy been a source of empowerment to women?

   - bringing change in relation to their social and political situations

   - bringing change in relation to their economic situations

   - bringing change in relation to their psychological situations

Methodology

Overview of the Field Site

This research was done in one of the adult literacy centres of Dhangadi village in Siraha district in the eastern *terai* (plain) of Nepal. This site was chosen because it was adjacent to my home district, because the culture was one with which I was familiar and the literacy program, run by Save the Children USA, aimed to empower women and was widely regarded as successful in this respect. My own experience of being a housewife in this area[5] added to the interest I had in doing my research in this community. In relation directly to my research question, as the literature on women[6] in Nepal indicates women of the *terai* are most disadvantaged or least powerful in regards to the men in their households, it would seem a place in which, if literacy did contribute to empowerment in any way it would be more visible here than in communities where women were already relatively powerful. Finally, there are many different languages spoken in Nepali communities, most of which I do not speak. But the majority of the people in this area were Maithili speakers[7] who could understand and speak Nepali; even though it was difficult for the women to express their feelings in Nepali. And I also could understand Maithili enough to converse, although I had to hire an interpreter to help me with the more elaborate forms of expression the women often used when speaking of their feelings.

My research was conducted in three phases in the summer and fall of 1995. In the preliminary phase while in Kathmandu I reviewed literature and documents regarding women and literacy programs in Nepal. In consultation with the literacy program organizing agency working in Siraha district - Save The Children USA, I got permission to do ethnographic research in their program area and accordingly prepared for the field visit. The second phase included an extensive field stay and data gathering through observations and interviews etc. At the beginning of this stage I stayed about a week in the Save the Children USA field office in Dhangadi, Siraha and discussed my program with the field staff especially those working in the education and productivity sectors. With their help I

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[5] Although I do not belong to this culture, most of their ways have been adopted in our culture through long association with these people.

[6] For details see Status of Women report 1981 vol. 2 part 1 and 9.

[7] Maithili is the language of most of the people of this region despite caste or race.

selected one centre that was accessible and that had completed one cycle of a literacy program which included a six months basic and six months advanced course. And thus, for the third phase, the project area of Janasewi Mahila Samuha in the village of Bhawanipur was selected for the research because women there had completed both the courses and were engaged in some income generating activities. They had completed the literacy program in 1993 and were the ideal group for my research as I had envisaged. Before going to the field, the Save office staff made an appointment with the Village Development Committee (VDC) chief to get consent for the field work, which he granted. Accordingly, a date was fixed to meet the village women and necessary arrangements were made for the field visit.

Bhawanipur, is about 4 km. from the Dhangadi Save the Children field office which is situated just near the main highway passing through Dhangadi. For my first trip to Bhawanipur, I was accompanied by a member of the field staff to show me the village and introduce me to the women. He had a bicycle with a carrier where he put my bag and walked with me up to the village. It took nearly two hours[8] to reach the village. The bright afternoon sun of summer and the barren fields due to the delay in the mansoon made our journey hot and very difficult. In the month of July it had not rained[9] and the paddy fields lay barren with dried grass. I was perspiring and could imagine the days ahead of me in the field with no electricity and no fan to cool the air. I asked my partner why there were no trees on the road side which would have provided some relief to the passersby during such conditions. He explained "people want to grab more land for cultivation and do not bother about planting trees. It is really hard to convince them about the importance of tree plantation."

But when we reached Bhawanipur, it was really pleasant. The village was surrounded with trees and ponds. I sat for a while near a pond under the tree to breathe the cooler air and then continued my journey to where I was to meet the women. I had to wait for some time for this meeting as they had gone to the field for work. My partner left me at the house of the president of the women's group, and asked me to stay there until she came. There were children and an elderly man with whom I talked for a while. After half

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[8] Although it took two hours for me to reach the village, it takes one hour or even less for the average village people.

[9] Usually the monsoon starts by the first week of June, but this year it was late and had not started until the last week of July. So it was hotter than usual.

an hour the president of the women's group, in whose house I was supposed to stay, arrived. We talked for a while and a few other women of the group also came to see me. They then decided that it would be better for me to stay in some other woman's house where I could get air in that hot season. In her own house, the woman who was to host me said that all the women sleep in closed rooms and it would be too hot for me to sleep in that weather.

This selected place of residence proved very suitable for my research. It was in the midst of many homes within five minutes walk of all the homes where I wished to interview people, and not far from the fields or places where people gathered in the village. I had a cool place to sleep on a cot on the porch, and it was possible for me to set up a small table where I could sit and write notes each day after my visits around the village.

But at the beginning I was bewildered with the feeling that I might not get full cooperation of the villagers and especially of the women, as I was an outsider. I also felt that it might be difficult to have all conversations in Nepali as the women had difficulties expressing themselves fully in this language and I found I also had difficulty in speaking the local language, Maithili, although I could understand it well. I was worried whether or not I could get enough data from these women in this situation, and some of my friends in Edmonton had alerted me to the possible trouble of non-cooperation I might face in the field. It was essential for me to establish rapport before beginning any interviews and I was in need of a woman who could assist me for this purpose and for dealing with the language problems. I found one woman who had come there for sewing training from Saptari[10] and asked her for assistance in working in the village and with translation. She agreed to assist me, working with me at different times throughout my times in the village, which made my job much easier.

Before beginning my interviewees I discussed with the women my purpose for coming there and the importance of their cooperation in this regard. They all agreed to provide their support in whatever way I required, so a date was fixed a week later for a group interview.

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[10] Saptri is the district where I belong. So it became easier for me to ask this woman's help and also because she could speak both Nepali and Maithili well.

A few days later while I was sitting near a pond making plans for interviews, a group of young boys[11] came and began to ask me about my program and why I was talking with the women only. I had never seen these boys before and I wondered what I needed to tell them. Were they going to attack me because I would not talk to them? I told them who I was and what my interest was in dealing with the women in the village. Then I asked about them. The boys were from this same village but were now working or studying in Kathmandu and other parts of the country. I got much information about the village from them which made my research easier.

Actually all the people in the village helped me in a variety of situations and by various means. After a few days the people began to treat me as one of the members of their community and sometimes it was really difficult to ignore their invitations so that I could do my own work. Another difficulty arose when the women of other groups came to tell their stories and I had to listen passionately for hours. I wished I had as much time to stay in the field for my work as they demanded of me.

My original plan was to set appointments in which I would interview one person and then go to another, but it did not work well. The woman whom I had set the time with would not be available due to some other affairs or she would sit for a short period of time and would ask me to come back some other time. So I decided not to fix a time but interview whoever was available and for any period of time. Sometimes I felt awkward asking the same question over and over, for often women had listened while I was interviewing someone else. In this way I felt like I had to do the interview several times with the same individual. The interview was done in a story telling method, in that I would ask them to talk about certain things in their life and they would be encouraged to respond by telling stories about those things. More specific questions were asked when I needed to explore more than what they told me sponataneously (details of this will be discussed later).

Before I left the research field, I met with women in a group to discuss my very preliminary findings and to ensure they generally agreed with those findings. Discussion

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11 Throughout the text, as here, I am using terms like boys and girls as the equivalent term in Nepali would be used in this context. Thus boys are males, who may be young children or in Canada called young adults. They are not men until they marry and establish a family. In this case these boys would be around 20 years of age. I have discussed this use of terms further at the end of this chapter, and included a glossary in an appendix at the end of the thesis.

of the field data was also done with the Save the Children USA field staff, to test whether the results seemed credible to them. Finally a one day seminar was organized at Kathmandu with some of the NGOs including Save the Children USA staff and CERID staff to discuss the findings as a procedure of preliminary data processing.

Methodological Steps

The data for this research was treated as 'case study' data, as each of the six women represented a single case of a woman who had experienced a literacy program. That is, it was not the literacy program itself which made up the case, for my research question did not ask about the nature of that program, nor was it the village in which the women lived, for I had not started out to find out how literacy contributed to change at the community level. Rather, my research question had to do with how literacy impacted on women's lives, whether or not they experienced it as empowering, and if so what it was that they considered empowering about it in their lives. Thus, it was appropriate to address these women's experience as case studies.

Bromley (1986) writes that case studies by definition, "get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires) and tend to spread the net for evidence widely" (p. 23).

Kenney and Grotelueschen (1980) suggest that several "preconditions" can help the researcher decide on the appropriateness of using a case study. First, a case study can be considered when "the desired or projected objectives of an educational effort focus on humanistic outcomes or cultural differences as opposed to behavioural outcomes or individual differences." (p. 3)

According to Merriam (1988) an example of this situation might be a community literacy program that teaches reading while at the same time empowering adults to take more control of their lives. While quantitative measures might be used to assess "empowerment", data gathered from interview and observation would yield more insight into the changes that had occurred (p. 30). He goes on to say:

> Case study research, and in particular qualitative case study, is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena. (Merriam, 1988, p. 2)

The case study, Foreman says, is particularly useful when the problem involves developing a new line of inquiry, needs further conceptualization of factors or functions,

"demands emphasis on the pattern of interpretation given by subjects," and involves determining "the particular pattern of factors significant in a given case" (p. 419).

For this study, the conclusion and findings have been drawn on the basis of case studies of the women, other field sources, and my personal reflection.

The overall approach to data collection was ethnographic. According to Spindler and Spindler (1987) ethnography is the study of human behaviour in a social context and an ethnographer is interested in social interaction and the ways in which the environmental context imposes restraints. An ethnographer according to them is interested in the meaning that social actors in context assign to their own behaviour and that of others and is concerned with the way in which people organize information relevant to their behaviour in a social context (p. 18). A good ethnography should seek to follow some specific criteria which include - contextual and relevant observations, use of prolonged and repetitive observations and other forms of inquiry to understand the native view of reality and to elicit socio-cultural knowledge held by the informants. They further suggest that the ethnographic interviewer must not predetermine responses; her research must promote the unfolding of emic cultural knowledge in its most heuristic, natural form; technical devices such as cameras, audio tapes, video tapes, and field-based instruments enable the ethnographer to collect more live data (pp. 19-20).

At one level, the assumption that the researcher is a stranger going into a foreign culture which lies behind ethnographic research strategies such as this does not hold for me in this research. That is, it would take possibly years in a field site for someone from the US or Canada to grasp the complex patterns and structures of Nepal's particular variant of Hindu culture, but for me those years are simply my life. But at another level the overall approach recommended by the Spindlers is appropriate, for in local terms I share neither a cultural nor social class background with the women of this village. Like an urban Canadian doing research in a farm community, or Spindler trying to understand the life of Hobos in his own country, I had to listen and observe very carefully as I lived with the people of this community. And like any researcher working within their own culture, I had to be even more alert to what I 'take for granted', what I 'assume', for it may turn out not to be true in this village, among these people. The more difficult ethnographic task for me is to understand enough of Canadian culture that I can present this work in a way a Canadian can understand it.

Selection of people to be interviewed

It was assumed before going to the field that all the women of one literacy centre which ideally consisted of 20 - 25 women, would be included in group interviews, with about seven or eight women in each group interview. The women who completed the basic literacy program in 1992 or 1993 were to be chosen for group interviews and individual interviews were to be done with about six women to provide six "case studies" of women's literacy experience.

But in the field the situation did not lend itself to this procedure. The women from the literacy class had formed into a women's group for production, and it was found that only 11 women were present to form this women's group and only married women were involved in the group. So only these 11 women were available for the group interview. The unmarried girls had been dropped from the activities which followed the literacy program, because they would not stay in the community long enough to enable them to develop the productive work. That is, they had to go away after their marriage and their departure would affect the project's objectives. Nevertheless, three girls who took part in the basic and advanced literacy program were interviewed individually to get an insight into how they felt about the program; their activities after the program; and their future prospects.

That is, of the original group of 25 who started the basic literacy class, 17 were married and eight were not; of the eight three had already left the village and I selected three of those remaining to interview. Of the 17 married, 6 had dropped out either in the basic or in the advanced course and so could not continue in the production group which followed the literacy program. As the production group was my entry group into the village, and all members had also completed the full cycle of literacy program; I concentrated my efforts on the 11 who formed the production group, doing a single group interview with them and selecting six of them for individual 'case studies'.

As this group represented the women from two ethnic groups I decided to include three women from each group. With my concern to get more information from these women I selected three who had been more informative in the group discussion and three from the rest. Most of the women in the production group were from the older age group, above 30, so most of these women interviewed are from this age group. Among the two daughters-in-law, I could include only one because of the unavailability of the other's time for the interviewing required for my data.

Within the village, as implied by my story about the boys on the road, I talked with many other people, men and women, as I went about my daily activities. But formally, for purposes of gathering background information, I interviewed only the village chief, social workers, and the facilitator of the literacy program.

Data Collection Procedures

This research used one group interview, individual interviews and observation to collect data. The purpose of doing the group interview was to get preliminary information about the program and identify the interviewees for the case studies. The individual somewhat more formal interviews and the casual conversations with these and other women in the village were to collect data in the authentic voice of the women, and to find out if those who had taken part in the literacy program experienced changes after it.

(a) Group Interview

A group discussion is best suited for a homogeneous group (Merton; Fiske; Kendall 1990), for example with program participants to elicit their view about a particular program. For the purpose of my study, a group was formed from among the women who had completed the six month basic and six month advanced cycle of a literacy program and had already formed an organization involved in some income generating activities. The group interview was in Maithili and Nepali and was tape recorded and transcribed to ensure all of it would be available for analysis, although as it developed, this interview proved to be more for developing relations with the women than actually gathering data.

Care was taken to involve the participants in a permissive non-threatening environment (Kruger, 1988). A convenient place in the middle of the village, near a pond was selected by the participants themselves where only women were present. In the context of Nepal, especially in this community women feel free to express their feelings only in absence of men, so a place was selected where only women could gather in an informal group without the influence of other people.

Because the group interview was organized to introduce the researcher to the participants and to make the process of individual interviewing easier, only a few general questions were asked at this time. As so often happens in such a setting in Nepal, it also proved to be a setting in which the women could ask me many questions about myself and the research, and thus it was used to fully establish my place and work in the community.

(b) Interviews

Out of the 11 women, 6 women were identified for individual interviews. They were selected partly because of their willingness to give their personal interviews, but also because of the range of life stories which they could bring to the research.

The interviews were "flexibly structured" (Whyte, 1979) with open ended questions used to elicit a conversational response, and as described in the group interview, after rapport was established with the researcher. The interview questions were open ended and were modified according to the need, because direct questions sometimes did not elicit enough information. Care was taken to begin the interview in a friendly conversation style by introducing descriptive questions such as - what changes have you observed in your day to day life after the literacy program? What are your experiences before and after the program? These conversations were made with the interviewees on several occasions; and one interview with a key informant was lengthier and was tape recorded. The rest however were not taped as the casual conversation style of the interviewing, and the need to conduct the interviews whenever an opportunity arose, did not lend itself to taping. For those which were not taped field notes were written as soon as possible to ensure the most accurate recall, but after the conversation so as not to distract the informants.

Spradley (1979) suggests 3 key points to be considered in an ethnographic interview - explicit purpose, ethnographic explanations, and ethnographic questions. The explicit purpose must be given to the person being interviewed and it indicates the purpose of the interview and provides direction which tends to be more formal than friendly conversations. The ethnographer according to him takes more control of the talking to ensure it moves in the required direction. Ethnographic explanations imply giving repeated explanations from beginning to the end including explanations of the project, of recording procedure, of the interviewing, of the need for people to use their own language, and of the question. The ethnographic questioning includes asking descriptive questions to understand the informant's use of words; structural questions to gather knowledge about relations between terms or concepts; and contrast questions to delve more deeply into the meaning of various terms used in the native language.

These various issues were considered in the field research, although they were not followed 'to the letter'. For example, it was not necessary to ask people to speak 'in their own language' for, with little or no schooling, they had only the forms of discourse they used in their daily life. But the issue of whether the language of the conversation would be Maithili or Nepali was different; I would usually speak in Nepali which is my best

language. People would sometimes respond in Nepali but often shift to Maithili, and I too would shift to Maithili as that seemed necessary. Understanding informants use of words, the relations between concepts, and delving into the meaning of different terms involved the process as Spindler describes, but it was necessary in both languages and the woman who had agreed to help me with the Maithili was very helpful for this.

Also, constantly explaining the purpose of the research, and beginning every conversation in this fashion, would have interfered with my ability to talk with the women and gather data. Spradley is describing here a situation in which the people interviewed do not necessarily live in the same community, and frequent opportunities for conversation with the researcher are not possible. In this case, my purposes and the reasons for my interviewing were widely known in the socially compact village by the time I had been there a few days. After the first interview with each woman, it was only necessary for me to think in the interview if there was something in particular I wanted to achieve through it at this time.

(c) Observation

I lived with the community people for two months, once from June 29 to Aug. 12 and the second time from Sept. 2 to Oct. 3. I had to break between the periods as the women were busy with cultivation and could hardly give any time to talk with me. The gap was used to collect secondary data in Kathmandu. In general, both the observation and interviewing could be said to be done at the same time, as the research field work could be described as participant observation with the interviewees. I was able to observe the six women whom I chose for the case study, noting the behaviour and circumstance in their homes and outside.[12] In my observations I noted their position and their day by day activities in their public and private lives. This helped to identify other factors influencing their behaviour in actual situations. I recorded such observations daily in my field descriptions, as well as records of our conversations and questions I wanted to raise with them the next time we met.

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[12] By outside I mean the farm and market place where women often worked. I had to observe all these situations as some of them worked mostly in the farm, some worked mostly in the household and some did the marketting business, while some of them were doing all these jobs to support their family.

Data Analysis

The process of preliminary data analysis began immediately after the first group interview with the women. Through the transcription of the recorded interview and notes ideas were for focusing my research were generated. This process was helpful to generate some culturally specific questions relevant in the study. The preliminary analysis also helped me to find out other areas where I needed to do further observation and questioning.

I did not have much time to interpret my data in the field as most of the time was spent in interviewing, observation and collection of relevant data, revisions of these data was a continuous process to make sense of it and formulate my questions for further interviewing and observation.

The first thing I did with the data analysis was try to clarify in my own mind the assumptions I was taking into the field study. They were partly derived from the literature and partly from my own personal experiences. The ones I could recognize were:

- women are oppressed
- the social orientation of submissive ideology makes women reluctant to express themselves and so they remain suppressed
- illiteracy has contributed to their dependence and inability to access critical knowledge, and hence they are neglected as participants or as beneficiaries in the development process
- literacy can potentially help women to overcome all these drawbacks by building self confidence and self esteem, and enabling them to be active members of the society.

But I also needed to be clear on the over all orientation I was taking to this study, the framework through which I wished to consciously view the data. In this respect and in the context of empowerment I was influenced by two statements of Kreisberg (1992):

> 1. We must develop a critical understanding of domination. This calls for the development of a critical cultural literacy, one that can uncover what Maxine Green has called the "taken for granted world" and the ways in which domination functions in society and in our lives. Most importantly, it means we must identify and explore the situations that present opportunity for resistance and change.

> 2. We must find new modes of relationships which are not based on domination and submission are not organized into hierarchies of the powerful and powerless. . . . This calls for alternative ways of thinking about ourselves, our communities and our world. More profoundly, it calls for developing new ways of being with other people that can nourish emerging critical awareness and nurture a new set of needs and desires in everyday experience.(pp. 17-18)

Being aware of these assumptions which might interfere with my ability to see the situation, and accepting Kreisberg's frame for viewing that same situation, I began the formal data analysis. However, such analysis does not begin after the data is collected; rather it is a constant process of the field research as each evening I would sit down to write my field notes and try to make sense of them. During this time and later when I returned to Canada, data analysis was done thematically on the individual case studies of the six women based on the interviews/conversations with them, and supplemented by my observations. Verbatim quotes are presented in the text to display the situation in the authentic voice of the women. A thematic interpretation has been attempted to find women's reflection of their past life, the change they have observed since the literacy class and their aspirations for the future.

Interpretation

The data collected for the case study has been thematically interpreted. An attempt has been made to translate women's voice as they were heard in the field. Though most of the answers were made in Maithili only some of them that have a typical Maithili tone and expression have been written first in the cursive writing of the language and then been translated into English. Other narratives have been directly translated into English and recorded in my field notes in that way; despite this shift of language they are as close as possible to the authentic voices of the women themselves.

There are few terms which have been frequently used and may confuse the readers who are not familiar with them. The Nepalese use the term girl for an unmarried or young female and woman for a married woman or an adult female. The same case is applied to the terms boy and man. The term boy is used for an unmarried male and man for a married or an adult male. In addition, I have frequently used Nepali kinship terms, for translation into English loses much of the meaning; such terms differ depending on the age and sex of individuals, as well as which 'daughter-in-law' is first married into the husband's family. The term family too is a weak English translation; the normative family is a joint-extended family in which sons and their wives and children live with their parents. When a son and his wife leave the joint family they describe that leaving as 'separated', and they are eligible

for their portion of the family wealth. A glossary of such terms and words are given in Appendix (I).

Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity of a study depends mainly on the method of instrumentation. Guba & Lincoln (1981) state that:

> It is difficult to talk about the validity or reliability of an experiment as a whole, but one can talk about the validity and reliability of the instrumentation, the appropriateness of the data analysis techniques, the degree of relationship between the conclusions drawn and the data upon which they presumably rest, and so on. In just this way one can discuss the processes and procedures that undergird the case study -- were the interviews reliably and validly constructed; was the content of the documents properly analyzed; do the conclusions of the case study rest upon data? The case study is, in regard to demonstrating rigor, not a whit different from any other technique. (p. 378)

The documentation, field observation, group interviews and the individual interviews have served as referents for the findings of this study. As well, the multiple interviews with the participants have given points of triangulation. Personal documents (Bogden & Biklen, 1992) such as, my field notes and journal, refer to the first-person narratives and give a description of the participants' actions and perceptions in the social setting. Reliability and validity (Best & Kahn, 1987) in qualitative research are to a great degree dependent on the rigor of the researcher in (ethically) obtaining the data and analyzing the findings (Lather, 1986).

A researcher's insight and understanding of the participant's world add to the description of the complex social system being researched (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). Although I do not share a socio-economic position or local culture with the women in this study, to the extent they draw on the larger Nepalese cultural context, it is my own context and one which I know well, unlike the outside ethnographer. Besides, trustworthiness and the "criteria of goodness of fit" are major concerns of a qualitative research. These criteria include: (1) the problem or question is discovered out of personal curiosity and out of observation in the real world; (2) the researcher is a valuable research instrument; (3) the analysis uses cross-cultural perspectives; is open to competing paradigms; (4) a check against ethnocentrism, and personal biases with the researcher's personal talents; (5) the research is ethical and sensitive to its impact on subjects and settings; (6) there is an appropriate match between the information sought and the various modes of gathering and reporting the data; (7) original data is included so the reader can get a sense of the

complexities; (8) the analysis is "tied into the big picture" (Wolcott, 1975, modified by Marshall, 1985, p. 357).

Thus regardless of the type of research, validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study's conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analyzed and interpreted (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

Based on the description of the instruments used, I think I can claim the reliability and validity of my tools; the group interview, individual interview and observations. Besides, the information I gathered from the group interview and individual interviews were cross checked and I tested my understandings with women in the field in our daily conversations . Apart from this, I have described the context, my position during interviews and have explained details of the field.

Limitations and Delimitation

This study has been limited by the availability of participants and their time as women were busy in their household and other work. The time chosen for the field work was not ideal, although it fit within the program of studies of my university. Participants gave full cooperation, but the cultivating season and the diseases - diarrhea, cholera, red eye and the rumour of plague - had some negative effect on the field work.

The study was limited to a small group of women in a rural village in the *terai* region of south-eastern Nepal. It is recognized that all Nepalese women do not have the same situation as the women of this study, but it is anticipated that this research will be helpful in the design and implementation of programs for women in a similar situation, as well as suggestive for program planning in other areas.

Significance of the Study

Since the women's decade, issues of women's empowerment have often been raised in the developing countries including Nepal, and many strategies have been implemented to enhance women's condition. In Nepal, although 75% of the women in the country are still illiterate, literacy and awareness raising have been the major agenda for empowering women during the last two decades. But how far these programs have been able to achieve the goal is yet to be known. It is hoped that this study will be able to help understand the place that literacy actually takes in women's lives, and the sense in which it is empowering. The study is expected to contribute to formulating and implementing strategies and programs for literacy offered by various organizing agencies and hence to benefit the women at the same time.

The two chapters which follow immediately will present the information and data gathered during my research in Nepal. The first, chapter 5, will describe in more detail the village setting and the nature of the Save the Children's literacy program; the second, chapter 6, will present the data gathered from the women and participant observation in their village. The final chapter will draw inferences and conclusions from the material presented in these two chapters and point to possible program implications.

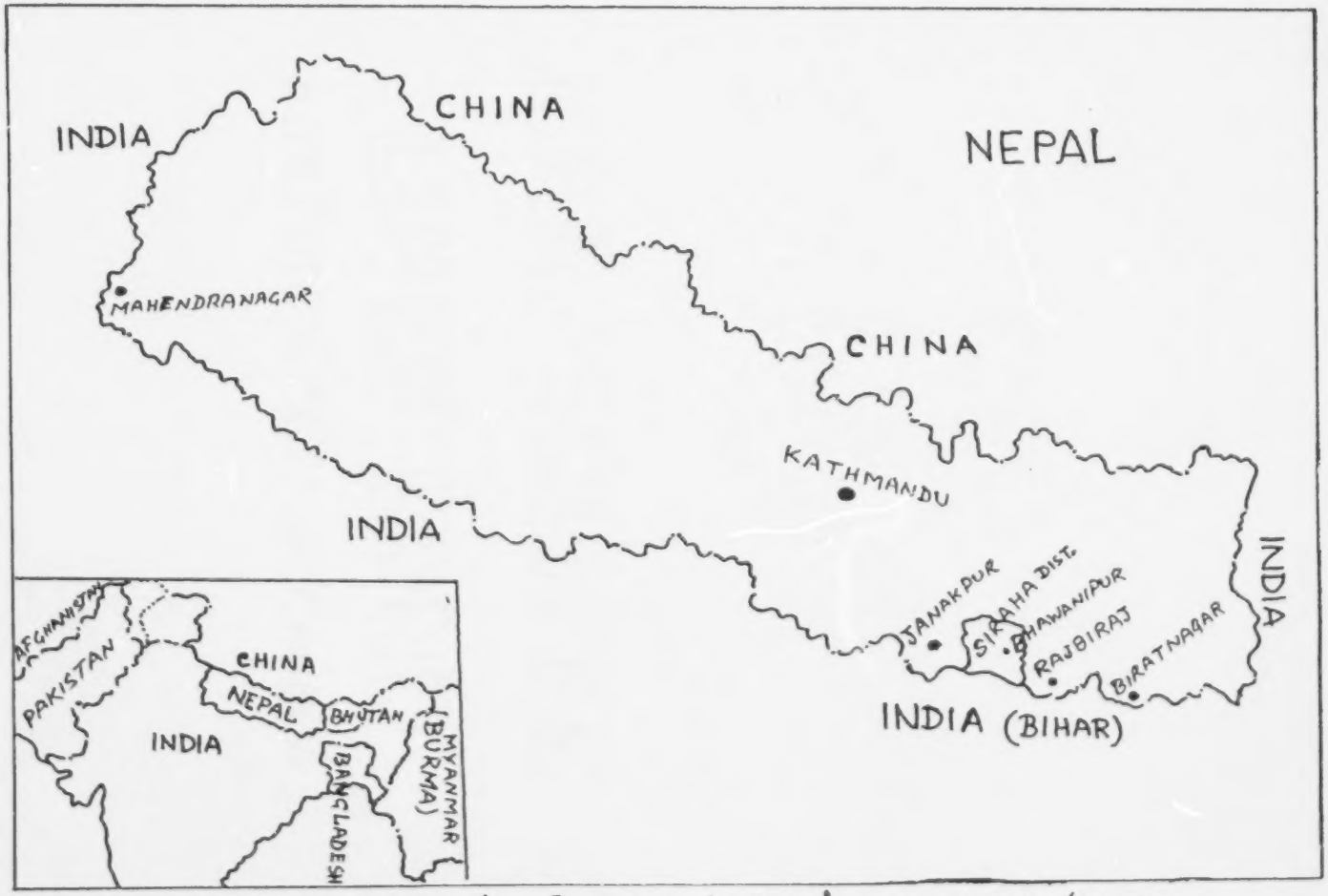
Chapter 5

The Field

Country and people

Nepal is a small Himalayan kingdom landlocked between two huge countries; in the north by China and in the south by India. It has a area of 147,181 sq.km. and a population of 19 million, of which 50% are women. The physical features of the country pose a serious constraint to its development. Nepal is divided into three natural regions on the basis of altitude: the Himalayan or Mountain region, the Hill region and the *terai* region. These three belts contain, respectively, 23, 42 and 35 percent of the total land area, and 7.8, 45.6, and 46.6 percent of the population. Approximately 18 percent of the total land is under cultivation, 42 percent is forest, 12 percent is permanent pasture land and 15 percent is wasteland. The plains land or *terai* lies along the southern border between 75 and 300 meters above sea level, a wide band of hills between 300 and 3,000 meters, and the northern mountains from 3000 to 8,500 meters. The *terai* which accounts for about 54 percent of the country's total cultivated area is the most fertile land and is called the "granary of Nepal"(Census, 1991). This region is generally hotter than the other two regions; the summer temperature goes up to 40 - 42 degrees Celsius while the lowest temperature remains at 10 - 15 degrees Celsius during the winter time (Shrestha & Singh, 1992).

Nepal is a veritable mosaic of dozens of ethnic groups each with their unique language and culture. The dominant ethnic groups are mainly the descendants of Aryan and Mongolian races. In the north of the country, which borders the Tibet region of China, the people are generally of Mongoloid origin, and their cultural and religious roots are Tibetan. In the south, which borders the Indian region the majority of the people are of Indo-Aryan origin. In the temperate zone of the middle hills numerous ethnic groups exist, both of Mongoloid and Indo-Aryan races, as well as an admixture of the two. The social customs and traditions vary according to the ethnic groups and most of them have their own dialect (RIDA, 1991). According to the 1981 Census Report, there are at least 18 different mother tongues, with 58% of the population speaking Nepali followed by 11% Maithili, 8% Bhojpuri, 4% Tharu, 3% Newari and 3% Tamang. Nepali is the National and official language of the country and the majority of the people understand and speak it, although many will have a second language as mother-tongue and most of the highly educated population also speak English.



Map drawn by Prashant Luitel from various sources.

Nepal's cultural heritage is based on syncretistic integration of Hindu and Buddhist practices. Though the social system, culture, customs and traditions of Nepal is an amalgam of both Hindu and Buddhist philosophies and teachings, Hinduism is the predominant religion. According to 1981 census 89.5 % of the people followed Hinduism, 5.3% Buddhism, and 2.7% Islam. Hinduism being the major religion in the country has an influence on the total socio-cultural environment, as well as in the legal framework.

Economy and administration

Nepal is predominantly an agricultural country with more than 90% of the total population depending on agriculture for their livelihood. Nepalese agriculture is largely characterized by a mixed farming system, heavily dependent upon monsoon rainfall. Only 14 percent of cultivated land is under irrigation. In the hills, most of the cultivated land is in the upland category, largely devoid of irrigation, and with soil that is very low in plant nutrients. In the *tear*, most of the land is potentially irrigable, has better yielding capacity and the country is mostly dependent on this area for national food requirements. The *terai* also has better physical and institutional infrastructures than are found in the hills (Yadav, 1987).

Although almost all families in Nepal hold some land, land distribution is extremely skewed. Approximately 50 percent of households have holdings of less than one-half hectare, accounting for only seven percent of the cultivated area. Conversely, 47 percent of cultivated land is held by only 9 percent of all households. Sixty-seven percent of households have holdings of less than one hectare, accounting for 17 percent of cultivated land (Yadav, 1987).

The land distribution is even more skewed in the *terai* than in the hills. Among households owning less than one-half hectare of cultivated land, 46 percent of *terai* households own only 3 percent of all cultivated land, compared with 54 percent of hill households owning 12 percent of cultivated land in the hills (Yadav, 1987).

Being an agrarian country, about 80% of the industries are based on agriculture and its products, and 56% of the gross national product (GNP) is derived from agriculture (Census, 1991). Tourism is another major source of income apart from agriculture. The country has a per capita income of US $ 160, with 10% of the GNP in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA) specifically as multilateral and bilateral grants and loans (UNICEF, 1990, p. 86). Nepal is highly dependent on India for trade and commerce due

to its physiological features and has a conspicuous trade deficit with India and the rest of the world (Shrestha & Singh, 1992, p. 158).

The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1996) of the country has given priority to the economic upliftment of its citizens by tackling the problems of economic stagnation, and poverty, structural distortions, environmental degradation, and rapid population growth. The plan aims at raising the economic growth rate from 3% to 5% and employment by 3% (Shrestha and Singh, 1992, p. 5). Over the period, 1977-87, 55% of the urban population and 61% of the rural population lived below the "absolute poverty line" (UNICEF, 1990, p. 86).

For administrative purposes, the country is divided into 5 development regions, 14 zones, and 75 districts. The district is again divided into several Ilakas[1] , Village or Town Development Committees (VDCs) and wards.

Nepal attained democracy the second time in 1989, immediately prior to which it was governed by a partyless panchayat system and absolute monarchy. The first democracy was obtained in 1952 from the autocratic Rana regime but it was overthrown by the king in 1960 by a military coup. Since May 1991 - Nov. 1994 the democratically elected government of the Nepali Congress Party ruled the country and in the mid-term poll of November 1994 the United Marxist Leninist (UML) won power. The unstable political situation has had a negative impact on the development of the country.

Health and education

Nepal counts among the countries with the highest infant and child mortality rates in the world. According to the 1991 census the infant mortality rate is 107 per 1000 live births. The life expectancy at birth is 54.02 years with that of males 55 years and females 52 years, and the fertility rate is 5.60 births per women. The figures over the period 1985-87 suggest that only 29% of the population have access to safe water, with 70% of the urban people having such access but only 25% of rural people (UNICEF, 1990, p. 80). There are 111 hospitals, 4768 hospital beds, 816 health posts, 18 health centres, 145 Ayurvedic services centres, 1176 doctors (including Surgeons and Homeopathic), 234 Kaviraj and Vaidyas, 2980 nurses and others health workers (Census Report 1991). Primary health-care is carried out mostly by health posts and health centres.

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[1] One Ilaka consists of 7 to 10 villages depending on the population and size of the village, and each village has nine wards.

According to the 1991 Census Report, the literacy rate in Nepal is 40%. The male literacy rate is 55% while the female literacy is only 25%. The net primary school enrollment ratio of males to females for the period of 1986-88 was reported to be 76:35. About 28% of those enrolled for grade 1 complete primary level (to class 5) and most of the dropouts were females. The gross secondary school enrollment ratio for the period 1986-88, males to female enrollment, was 35: 11 (UNICEF, 1990, p.82).

Policies and priorities for women's development

Women still remain underrepresented in politics, at both local and national levels. During the International Women's Year, legislative efforts were made to ensure that at least one woman would be nominated to each Village and Town Committees. The amendments made in 1977 removed these provisions and there are no longer any legal requirements for the local level committees to include women as members (UNICEF, 1987). However at the national level the present government has made provisions to ensure that each party has 5% of women while contesting the election.

During the Women's Decade there were significant attempts to address women's issues at the national level, and several units and cells were established in several ministries to support women's development programs. The Women's Development Section (WDS) was set up in the Ministry of Local Development in 1980, to promote, initiate and supervise activities to integrate women into development activities. The Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW) program was initiated through this ministry to enhance women's ability to generate subsistence and market income.

The Women's Service National Coordination Committee (WSNCC) was established in 1977, and was given a broad mandate to promote and supervise women's development activities. Although it was first established as a coordinating body, it also runs several programs concerned with literacy, scholarships for girls, income generation activities, and nursery schools. It also runs Mothers' Clubs in several parts of the country and is one of the largest NGOs in the country.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare each have Women's Development Cells to coordinate their programs directed to women. These Ministries provide training programs for women in their own areas with an aim to bring them into the mainstream of development. The Ministry of Agriculture provides training and loans to women in the field of agriculture through its Small Farmers Development Program (SFDP). This program has a wide coverage through the Agriculture

Development Bank (ADB). The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare has recently established another women's section to act as a focal point for women's issues in relation to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) (UNICEF, 1987).

Although various ministries were involved in women and development programs, the sixth plan (1980-85) formally addressed for the first time the issue of women's role in national development. A task force of senior policy makers was mobilized in 1981 under the auspices of the Women's Social Services National Coordination Committee (WSSNCC), to formulate a National plan of Action for women's development. This Plan proposed strategies to be implemented by government and non-government agencies and institutions in the fields of education, health, employment, agriculture, forestry, cooperative development, and the legal system. It also called for increased recruitment of women at all levels in extension and administrative fields through a program of incentives and quotas (UNICEF, 1987). The Seventh and Eighth Plans (1985-1990 and 1990-1995) also recognized women's importance to development but no specific measures were made to involve a maximum number of women in the development process.

The National Code (Mulki Ain) of 1963 brought about significant changes in family and property law and the legal status of women, moving towards equal rights for both sexes. The constitution also guarantees that there will be no discrimination against any citizen in the application of general laws, as well as in respect of political and civil rights, on the ground of religion, race, sex and caste. However, imbalances between rights of men and women persist both in the legal provisions, particularly for property, and in the interpretation and application of the law. Even where legal provisions stand in favour of women, they often lack the resources, skills, and social support to ensure the enforcement of their legal rights (Bennett, 1981).

Siraha the district of my research

Siraha is situated in the southern belt of the *terai* and is one of the six districts of Sagarmatha zone of the Eastern Development Region of Nepal. The district borders are Saptari to the east, Dhanusha to the west, Udayapur to the north, and Darbhanga district of India (Bihar) to the south. It covers an area which stretches east to west from 86.27 degrees to 86.6 degrees longitude and in latitude south to north from 26.33 degrees to 26.55 degrees north. Siraha is 400 km. south east of Kathmandu and 150 km west of Biratnagar. The altitude of the district ranges from 150 meters to 305 meters; except for the Siwalik hills the district is on the whole flat (Save, Base line study 1990).

According to the census of 1991, the total population of the district is 460,746 out of which 80% are Maithili speaking, 6% Nepali speaking, 5% Magar speaking, 6% Tamang speaking and the remaining 4% speak other dialects. The average family size (using the census definition of a single family, not an extended family) is 5.7 persons. Because of the communication and cultural exchange taking place[2] rapidly in this district as elsewhere in Nepal almost everybody can understand both Maithili and Nepali; however some of them, especially the female Maithili speakers, still find difficulty expressing themselves in Nepali.

Out of the total area (101,300 ha.) of the district, 82% is cultivated. The remaining 18% is forested land, river course and rock outcrops. Of the total cultivated land 83% is lowland and 13% is *pakho* (upland). The average land holding per household is 1.3 ha. The major crops are rice, corn, wheat, millet, tobacco, mustard, jute, sugarcane and potato. Siraha was famous for hemp previously but now sugarcane has taken its place. Vegetable cultivation is common among the Koiris[3]. Popular fruits are mango, litchi, jack fruit, banana, papaya and some citrus fruits. Every household owns some livestock, common among them are cattle, buffaloes, goat and pigs (Save Baseline study 1990).

Water resources are limited and most of the streams run underground, coming to the surface when they reach the *terai*. The main streams of the district are Kamala, Mainawati, Gagan, Khutti and Balan. But these streams do not serve as a permanent source for irrigation. Kamala irrigates about 12,500 ha. of land which is the only all weather irrigation system of the district. The rest of the *khet*[4] land is irrigated only in the monsoon.

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[2] Due to transportation and educational facilities people have recently begun to have the opportunity of interacting with each other. The Census Report shows that there has been a high tendency for families to move from the hills to the Terai and from the Terai to Kathmandu valley during the last three decades.

[3] These are the occupationally low-caste people. They are mostly engaged in growing vegetables.

[4] Khet land is a type of land especially prepared for rice cultivation, where the field is divided into small pieces and all the sides are raised with mud so as to hold water

Map drawn by Prashant Luitel from various sources.

MAP OF MAITHILI SPEAKING DISTRICTS OF NEPAL

Map drawn by Prashant Luitel from various sources.

Sugar, *bidi*,[5] and food processing are the major industries of the district. There are seven *bidi* factories, one*khadsari*[6] sugar factory, two brick manufacturing kilns and six saw mills. There are 414 small, 4 medium and 5 big rice and oil mills in Siraha. The district exports rice, jute, tobacco, skin, herbs, animal products, oil and livestock and imports textile, salt, kerosene, gasoline, medicine, machinery, furniture and equipment materials for development (Save Baseline study 1990).

Save the children US program in the district

Save the children US initiated a community development program in this district in the year 1990, a replica of its program in the Gorkha district which was implemented for the first time in 1981. Since then there has been gradual expansion of project sites. Presently Save has programs running in 14 Village Development Committees (VDCs) in Gorkha district and six in this district, Siraha. The basic program envisaged in the first place for Siraha was related to reconstruction and rehabilitation to help the earthquake victims in 1988. It was then extended to a community based integrated rural development program to help the poor and needy people of that area (Save 1991).

The primary objective of the Save the Children programs is to build up a viable institution at the local level which can carry out development programs with participation of the maximum number of people for improving the quality of life in the community. For attaining this goal, development of local leadership, importation of skills to the local people and mobilization of local resources are considered as basically important (Save, 1991).

Save first started a model village program in the year 1992/ 1993 in Medinipur VDC in Dhangadi Village with the literacy campaign which was to make all of the village people literate. The total adult illiterate population, both male and female above 15 years, were taken into literacy classes. There were six centres in total four of which continued to the advanced level. Following the literacy program women were encouraged to form women's groups to work in an Income Generation (IG) program; these groups were required to have more than 10 women in each group. Women from the same neighbourhood were taken in

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[5] Bidi is a kind of cigarette where tobacco is wrapped in a special kind of leaf instead of a paper. It is made locally and is popular among the low class village people

[6] Khadsari kind of sugar, not totally refined, and is yellowish in colour made out of sugar cane

a group to make the program stable and run well. Now Save the Children has several literacy and income generating programs in the district.

Save has both a formal and non-formal educational component, the first directed at children in schools and the second at adults. The non-formal education component of the Save program is one of the most popular activities. In it the participants learn basic literacy and numeracy skills and receive functional knowledge in health, agriculture, resource conservation, and community leadership development. The participants of such literacy programs are mostly women.

Women and Development

Since 1989 the integration of women in the program of Save the Children has been a priority strategy. Most of the programs are now designed and implemented for women and for children through women. The formation of women's groups has thus been an emphasis of the program during the last few years and it is envisaged that these women's group will become independent to work by themselves in the long run. Save the Children Gorkha Field Office has already planned to implement an independent *Ilaka*[7] wide women's group by the Fiscal Year 1996 and the field office will no longer be supporting direct service delivery in this *Ilaka*. All the programming will be managed by the new women's NGO constituted by the management of the existing SC/ US women's groups in this area. The Save the Children US will provide technical and managerial assistance as well as linkages with funding agencies (Save, Baseline study 1990).

The literacy program for women of Save has been well established and is acknowledged nationally as an effective entry point for community development. This literacy program has been regarded as one of the successful programs in the country in creating a platform for facilitating integrated development activities. The general understanding is that basic and functional literacy give women the exposure to become effective development cadre in their community. After graduating from these literacy classes the women are assisted in forming women's development groups. These groups then design, implement, and monitor development activities in their communities. Members of each group participate in a variety of income generation activities, tree plantation, and forest protection work, mother and child health mobile clinics and sanitation programs.

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[7] An Ilaka is the area divided for the purposes of development which covers more than one village. One district will have 9 Ilakas

Literacy Program approach

Save the children organizes literacy programs in two phases. The first is a basic course and the second an advanced course. In the first phase, that is called the basic literacy class, emphasis is given to literacy and numeracy skills. In this basic class that is run for six months, the literacy primers developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) are used. These primers include Naya Goreto 1-3 steps. The Naya Goreto series, steps 1-4 are also widely used by the other government, NGOs and INGOs in their literacy program in the country. These primers are developed with a key word method and emphasis is given to the knowledge of the 3RS. After completion of this basic course the adults are expected to be able to further develop their reading, writing and numeracy skills.

Once they complete their basic literacy course, they are taken into the advanced literacy class where they are expected to learn functional literacy and develop motivation for an income generation program and formation of a women's group. The Naya Goreto Step 4 and Koselee first and second part are used as readers in this class. With emphasis on their reading and writing skills they learn about health and sanitation, child care, preparation of jeevan jal and environmental care. The formation of the women's group is expected to enable continued development to occur with the women, both in literacy and economic terms.

In both the basic and advanced classes, illiterate women from age 15 and above are taken. Once they complete these two courses and form the women's group, the unmarried girls are dropped out; that is, these girls are not taken into the women's group or the income generating activities. This is because these girls would leave the group after their marriage (they would go to another village, the village of their husband) and their departure would create problems in the functioning of the group and its activities.

The literacy class is organized when there are more than 8 participants willing to take part in the class not exceeding 30 people in total. But usually the standard size is 20-25 women in a class. The centre for a class is selected after discussion with the village people and the women who are willing to take part in the program. When there are a considerable number of participants who meet the necessary criteria to run a literacy class, a centre is sanctioned by the Save the Children's Field Office.

After the centre is selected, the facilitator (teacher) is selected with the help of the participants and village people. The person selected should have at least an 8 grade pass and be a responsible person. Priority is given to a female candidate. This selected

facilitator is then interviewed by the related field officer and recruited. A 10 day training is provided to the person and her work and the training program are evaluated at the end of the program. After 2-3 months of the program training is provided again to the facilitator for 3-5 days' duration.

A literacy management committee is formed in each centre for the effective functioning of the program. This committee includes one president and one member from the general village population as well as two members from the participants. The facilitator works as the secretary of the committee. This committee is responsible for the selection of the place for classes, identifying and selecting the participants to go for the class and reporting on project matters to SAVE's office.

The class is run for two hours every evening for 6 days a week. There is a monthly fee of Rs.1 in addition to the entrance fee, which is Rs.5 for each participant. In addition participants pay Rs.3 for the book. The stationeries and other necessaries are supplied free of cost by the Save Office. The facilitator is paid Rs.450 a month for the first three months and Rs.500 for the next three months in the basic class. In the advanced class, she is paid Rs.550 for the first three months and Rs.600 for the next three months.

The teaching materials include text books: Naya Goreto steps 1-3 and Koselee part 1 and 2, the facilitator's guide, a black board, posters for discussion, posters for letters, numbers, words and play cards. Each center is provided with one lantern and kerosene oil for the evening class.

The Setting

Bhawanipur Village Development Committee is situated 4 km. south from the East West highway. Ward no. 3 of Bhawanipur village which was the focus of this research has a population of 465 of which 241 are females. It has 69 households consisting of 33 Choudhari[8] (Tharu), 13 Saha (Teli)[9] , 2 Mandal (Dhanuk),[10] and 21 Mandal (Khatwe).[11]

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[8] By caste the Choudharis are known as Tharus. A Choudhari is the title given by the rulers to the village head, so they feel proud of using this title. I have preferred to write Choudhari instead of Tharu for this reason. They are the original inhabitants of the Terai region.

[9] By occupation Telis are the oil extractors. They are considered in the low caste groups and prefer to use the term Saha instead of Teli, so I have used the term Saha in my text

[10] Dhanuks belong to one of the poorest class of the society. They live on other's land and work for others for survival. According to Bista, historically these people worked as personal attendants of rich Brahmin and Rajputs. They often write Mandal instead of Dhanuk when referring to themselves.

Each of these groups of people live in their own separate ethnic clusters in the village, mostly divided by a road. The design of the house for each household looks similar having a courtyard in the middle and 3 - 4 buildings or 'houses' around the courtyard. Each building is used for a separate purpose, one will be a bedroom cum storage area, another a kitchen, and the other for the livestock. The small family usually will have bedroom and storage in one house, while the large family will have separate houses for each purpose.

A cluster map, on the next page, shows the arrangement of households. This cluster includes mostly ward number 3 and some of the houses from ward numbers 4 and 5. Most of the participants in the program I studied were from ward 3, none were from ward 4 and only one from ward 5.[12]

The total Village Development Council (VDC) including this ward is surrounded by trees and ponds and looks green compared to other adjacent villages. The temperature during the summer is a maximum of 35-40 degrees Celsius and minimum of 15 - 20 degrees Celsius. During the winter time the maximum temperature will be 18 - 20 degrees Celsius and the minimum 4 - 10 degrees Celsius. But due to the trees and ponds it is not excessively hot during the evening and morning time, even in the summer. The trees surrounding the areas are mostly mangoes, sisoo,[13] and bamboo shoots. The main crop is paddy (rice) but as there is no stream the crop is dependent on rain water. A few of the wealthier people have managed to use a pumping system set up for cultivation.

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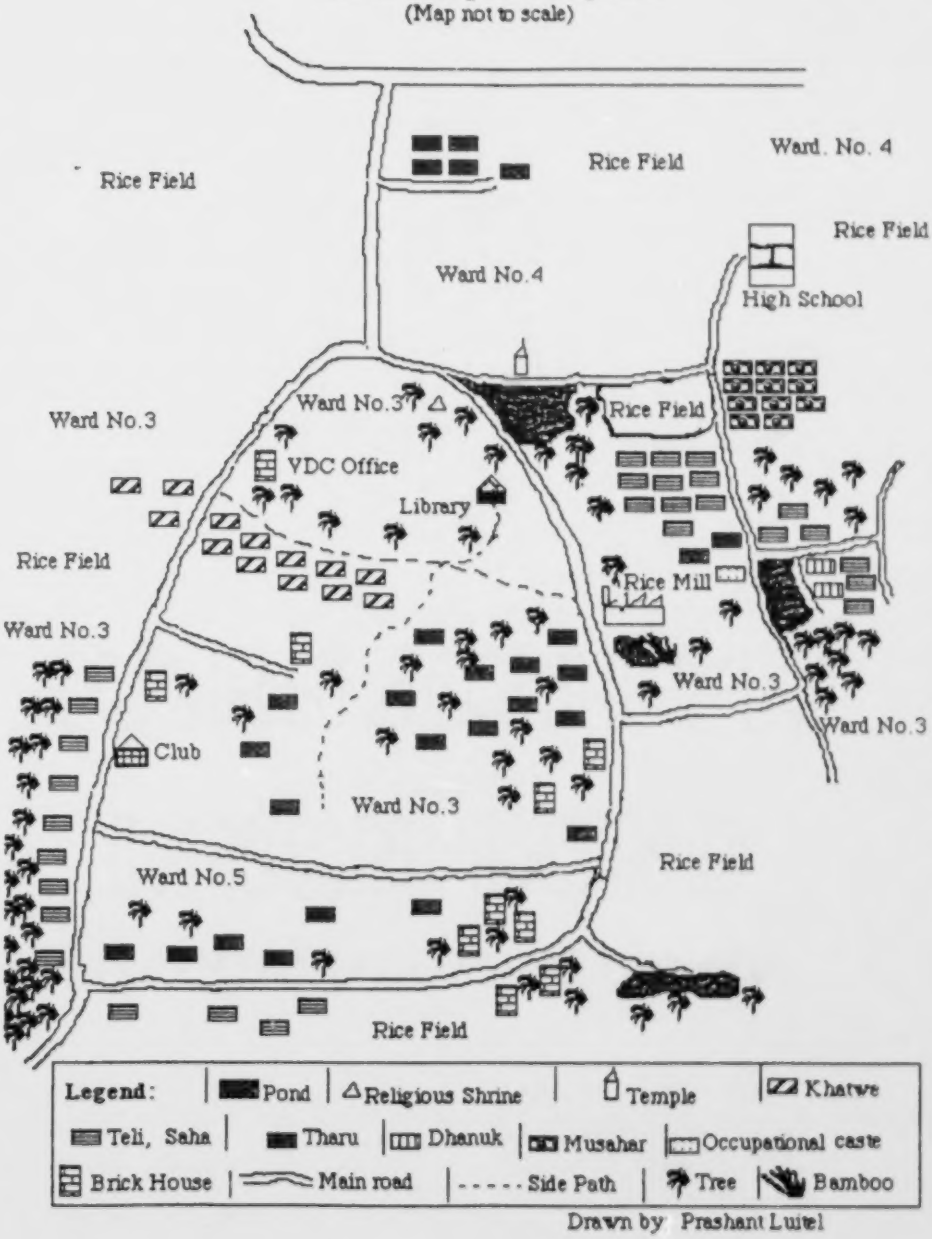
[11] Khatwes are considered among the untouchable caste groups. They at present live on wage earning; previously they used to carry a case for the bride in marriage. They also use the title Mandal which is used by the Dhanuks, so to avoid confusion I have used the term Khatwe for them in my text. For details of all these groups, please see People of Nepal by Bista (1967).

[12] However, in my cases, five of the women belonged to ward 3 and only 1 from ward 5

[13] Sisoo is a kind of tree that is used to make furniture. It is fast growing and the wood is expensive, so people are encouraged to plant this tree as a cash crop.

Cluster Map of Study Site

(Map not to scale)



Drawn by Prashant Luitel

Economy

Most of the people in this ward own 1 to 1 and 1/2 *kattha* [14] of land. Some of them with an extended family own more than 25 *bighas* as was common in the past, but such big landlords today are few, at most 5 or 6 households in this cluster area. Those who have small land holdings, or are landless, work for others in the fields or are engaged in small businesses such as food processing, kitchen gardening, animal raising and shop keeping. Most of the young educated males, who work as teachers, have gone to different city areas seeking jobs. Some work as labourers in the garment factory in Kathmandu. Some of the educated males were also found working on the farms as they were unable to find a job, but educated men usually do not like to work on the farm and mostly leave home to search for work elsewhere. The undergraduates were mostly found with such employment problems. No one from this ward was found to be engaged in big business or had a large land holdings. There is one rice, oil and flour mill in the ward which has provided services to the village people.

Most of the Choudharies work in the field and their main source of income comes from the food grains or livestock. Some of them also work for others. Choudhari women also do food processing such as making *chiura* and *muri* [15] which they sell in the market.

The Sahas are mostly engaged in small businesses such as buying and selling food grains, keeping shops etc. They do not seek wage earning employment and Saha women do not work in the field and do not do food processing. [16] They keep some livestock for their own personal use and to sell in the market.

The Khatwes are the poorest people in the community and live almost only on wage earning. Some of them also have livestock especially pigs and chicken as a source of income and for personal subsistence.

The main crops of the people are rice, wheat, potato, onion, and vegetables; due to the lack of irrigation facility the crops are mainly dependent on rain water. The wealthier

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[14] 1 Kattha = 3645 sq.ft. and 20 Katha= 1 Bigha

[15] Chiura and muri are made out of rice which need 2-3 days processing. These foods are commonly used in the Terai region for snacks and breakfast as ready made foods. As these are dry foods they last for a long time. Only the women especially the Choudharies prepare them and sell in the market.

[16] The Sahas (Telis) are considered among the low caste groups so people usually do not eat food cooked by them; therefore they deal only with dry food grains and other things.

families who have managed to acquire pumping sets are able to obtain higher yields than the rest. Some people also own private ponds and obtain fish for their own use and to sell in the market and some have mango garden and earn quite a bit from the fruits.

Some men and women work as teachers in the near-by school, including two women teachers in the primary level from this ward. In the household, usually men are the cash holders and the managers; if there is no adult male in the household only then do women deal with cash. Among the Choudharies there is a custom to choose a manager within the family to take care of the household business; he will not necessarily be the head of the household but he will always be a male. He then holds the right to deal with all the financial as well as other family affairs, and no one interferes with him. No record is kept as to who spends how much and money is spent as necessary, not according to the share each person in the extended family may hold. Many times family disputes arise as a result of this form of management, and those who feel less benefited ask for separation from the extended family, setting up their own separate households. Nevertheless extended families continue to exist in these communities, especially among the Choudharies.

In the ward, there are 5 *pakka* [17], houses 8 tile roofed houses with the walls made of mud, and the rest have*kacha*[18] houses in which the wall is made of mud and the roof of thatch. All the people manage to afford their daily meals and no one was found in absolute poverty during my time in the field.

Social

It is difficult to describe the social groupings of the people, because more than one term may be applied to the same group, sometimes because the group themselves prefer a different name than the name others give them, and sometimes because the general name refers to a larger caste category and the specific name a sub-caste within that group. The main groups of the people in this ward are the Tharus, the Telis, and the Khatwes. All of them live in harmony with the others even though there is a hierarchy based on the caste system. The Tharus are the high caste groups among the three, then come the Telis and then the Khatwes. By occupation the Tharus (Choudharies) are farmers, the Telis (Sahas) are businessmen and the Khatwes (Mandal) are wage earners. Traditionally the Khatwes

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[17] Houses that are made of brick and cement are called pakka houses. They may be tile roofing or with terrace.

[18] These are houses either made of clay only or with bamboo and clay. They have mostly thatched roofing; some of them who can afford it also use tile roofing.

were the *doli* [19] carriers, but this occupation no longer exists and these people work for others. Each has a small house with a small courtyard and a small kitchen garden although some of them even live on other's land and no one among them has a large land holding.

The women among all the groups do not talk much with the male members of the society, except if necessary, and they have a deep respect for the elder brother of their husband and for their father-in-law. The men and women could be said to have separate worlds and so the work of men and women is also different. Women mostly work inside the household whereas the men work in the field. There is no sharing of the work in the household by the men whereas the women go to work in the field as well as do household work, especially the Choudhari and Khatwe women. The Saha women go to the field only to bring the food to others working there or for an observation, but they do not go there to work. [20] In all the communities both the male and female share in taking care of the livestock.

Women mostly cover their heads with the outer part of the sari. But the young girls and the married women who visit their *maiti* do not cover their head and are free from *purdah* [21] at that time. However the newly married women cover nearly their whole face as a *purdah* ; as a *buhari* [22] is supposed to keep *purdah* all the time in her new household until a child is born. In years past there was no dowry system among the Choudharies who paid only bride price, but nowadays the dowry system is also prevalent among them as the educated boys, influenced by other people and general trends around them, demand it. The dowry system exists among the Khatwes but it is customary only for those who can afford to practice it; the poor people however have managed to marry without giving it. The dowry system is mostly prevalent among the Sahas, where the demand comes from the grooms' side and the parents have to meet those demands if they desire to marry their daughter into that house (family).

Among the Choudharies the mothers-in-law were found equally participating in the household labour or outside with the daughters-in-law, with the exception of those few

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[19] A doli is a case carrying the bride in marriage.

[20] Women keep distance with the male and only cover their head as pardah system. It is also regarded as a symbol of respect to their elders especially to the father-in-law and the elder brother-in-law.

[21] Women keep distance with the male and only cover their head as pardah system. It is also regarded as a symbol of respect to their elders especially to the father-in-law and the elder brother-in-law

[22] A daughter-in-law.

cases where their relationship is not cordial. This is in contrast to many of the households in Nepal, in which the mother-in law acts as the boss of the house after a daughter-in-law enters into the family. She mainly gives orders, only rarely helping in the household work when the daughter-in-law is unable to do some task.

Unlike the Choudharies, among the Sahas it was found that the responsibility of the household totally devolved on the daughter-in-law so the mother-in-law was freer to work outside the household. As the Saha women do not go to work in the field, they are either engaged in the household or are engaged in some kind of small businesses. In their case, the *purdah* system and dowry was more prevalent than among the Choudharies.

Marriage among the Choudharies was found to take place within Nepal and that mostly to men or women from the adjacent villages or the adjacent districts whereas among the Sahas and Khatwes it was mostly in India. Consequently, most of the latter two groups' customs and traditions are adopted from and look similar to the Indian culture, and all the people living in the village somehow or other have been influenced by each other's culture.

Education

The first primary school in this area was established in 2018 B.S.(1961), this school was promoted to a middle school in 2036 B.S (1979), and it was to a high school in 2048 B.S.(1991). This school is in ward 4 which is about a 5 minute walk from ward 3. There is another primary school also in ward 4, but to the present date there is no school in ward 3. There is a club and a small library in this ward. The club has been actively involved in the literacy program and runs literacy classes with assistance from the Save the Children US. At the time when there was no high school, people from this village went to Bastipur about 15 - 20 km. away for high school education, and for higher education they went either to Janakpur, Kathmandu or Madhubani of the Darvanga district in Bihar, India. Even with the high school since 1991, some still travel to these other places for high school, and they continue to do their higher education in these other cities.

Although men were found quite well educated, with some engineers and some doctors among them, women's education was far behind. Pannu Saha, who was the daughter of the *Pradhan Pancha*[23] or village leaderat that time, was the first woman to go to

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[23] Pradhan Pancha was the title given to the village head in Panchayat period. At present this position is known as village president.

the school from the ward when the school was established in 1961. She did only grade 2 or 3 after which she was married. Even though girl's education seems to have been encouraged to some degree in the village for a long time, it does not seem to have advanced as much as that of the boys. With the freeship (no tuition fees) and free text book distribution in the schools, most of the girls have now been enrolled in the school. At present the highest schooling desired for a daughter is grade 10.

At present most of the children go to school including the girls. No children in the households I observed remained out-of-school. There are 6 girls from ward 3 who have passed SLC (School leaving Certificate at the end of year 10) since schooling to that level became available in 1991, and they are all married at present. No women were found to have gone for higher education, but two of the women from this ward are school teachers in the primary level which is an occupation open to them when they have an SLC pass. One is a daughter-in-law who has married into a family in this ward, and the other is a daughter of a ward family who is already married to someone in an adjacent village.

The literacy rate in ward 3 is 56% among the Choudharies, 50% among the Sahas and of these about 80 percent of the illiterates are women (precise data on female literacy was not available). Literacy is very low among the Khatwes as only 21% of them are literate and more than 60% of the Khatwe illiterates are women.

Health

This ward has one woman health worker who is an HMG (His Majesty's Government) employee, and one woman volunteer who helps in identifying disease and finding treatment in the locality for women and children. They provide temporary family planning devices, refer or make arrangements for the laproscopy for women and also help in children's immunization. There is a monthly mobile clinic facility where they examine the mother and the child and provide necessary treatment. There is no health post in this village, villagers have to make a half-hour walk to the adjacent village if they need the services of the health post. But people usually go to the Lahan Hospital for treatment when necessary which is about 15 km from this community. For health conditions or diseases requiring major treatment they go to Darvanga, India.

There is a private practitioner who is called a doctor in ward 3. He does not have formal training, but received training or picked up knowledge while working with a doctor in a hospital in Darvanga, India. According to him, he has been practicing since 1961 when

there was no medical facility in the area. He gives free treatment to the villagers as he works in the mobile clinic.

Most of the people have tube wells in their court yard; some of them have wells, still almost all of them frequently use pond water for taking baths or swimming, washing dishes and clothes, etc. While I was in the village, I would see them bathing side by side with the water buffaloes in the same pond. As a result, during the rainy season most of them get diarrhea and cholera. Although in general all the children look healthy, diarrhea among them is common and is not considered serious. Most of the children under 5 are naked as they play or work around their household and on the streets, whereas those from 5 to 12 wear short pants. The girls above 8 or so wear frocks until they reach 14 or 15, when they change to saris. By the time they reach 16, most of them are married with only a few lucky enough to get chance for education after that. No deaths due to complication of pregnancy have been recorded recently but miscarriages and complication during pregnancy were not uncommon.

People usually go to an open field for toilet purposes; the men go to the creek side whereas the women go under the shade of a tree or bamboo bush. Children squat for toilet wherever they like and the mother cleans up afterwards. But if it is away from the house, no one bothers to clean it and it is cleaned either by a dog or a pig. Cow dung and buffalo dung is used as fuel and feces of other animals are used as manure directly in the field. No one was found to have a compost manure pit.

Save the Children USA's Program in the Community

The literacy program for women was initiated in ward 3 in the year 1992 and was completed in 1993. In the first year, there was a basic literacy class for six months beginning from December 1992, and advanced course for six months in the next year beginning from December of 1993. The program had three elements, the basic and advanced levels of literacy and the formation of a women's group. The basic level course was for six months where the participants were taught basic literacy and numeracy through courses developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (the Naya Goreto Series). In the advanced level, which was also for six months, they were given more skills on income generation, motivation to form a group and some more arithmetic. The Koselee series especially prepared for the neo-literate was used in the advanced course. After completion of the advanced course the women were encouraged to form a group. Although they started with 25 women in the basic literacy program by the time they formed group, which permitted only married women, there were only 11. After the group formation the women

were given training in the following areas; encouragement towards income generation activity, filling out bank vouchers, filling out cheques, writing applications and monthly reports, keeping accounts and information about different institutions

These courses were developed in the field and there were no particular texts for them. After the training program, a place for monthly meetings was identified and the group was given all the responsibility to work further.

There was an enrollment fee of Rs. 5 for each participant when they began the basic literacy program. In addition to this, each participant had to pay Rs. 2 for stationery and Rs. 1 monthly fee for the program. Initially they had paid Rs. 8 as a monthly fee but that was reduced to Rs. 1 every month. This money was kept as their seed money and a bank account was opened in the group's name. The money remained in the account until the advanced level literacy was completed and those who dropped out of the program were able to take back their money; the remaining funds were used for the income generating (IG program) after the women's group was formed.

Save does not force the program on people in the community but only initiates it if people are willing to take part. In Save's planning it is envisaged that a group of about 20-25 women will be formed to begin the literacy class and they will make a group approach to Save for the funding. The facilitator and a place for running the literacy class are also selected by the participants themselves. Priority is given to the married women in selecting the participants for the literacy class although 25% of the positioned are allocated to unmarried girls in both the basic and advanced level course. Once the literacy class is completed, inclusion of unmarried girls is strictly prohibited[24] in the women's group so only the married women are involved at this stage. Some of the criteria applied to a women's group before they can be assisted by Save are: individual members must be married, willing to take part in group activities, willing to take part in the IG Program, and the group should have a saving of Rs. 1000/- in their joint account.

When the women have brought the total of their account to Rs. 1000/- Save adds Rs. 5000/- to it to start the income generation program. It is up to the women to choose the kind of program they want to be involved in. Each woman can draw out money as a loan to start her income generation activity; she must pay it back after a year with 20% interest.

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[24] According to the Save field officer the unmarried girls were not included in the group due to the fact that they would be leaving the group after their marriage. This would create problem in the continuity of the program.

The interest will be accumulated in the group account and they will be able to draw out more money for their activities.

Seventy five percent of the cost is met by the Save project, while the other 25% is expected to be met by the group. So far the activities envisaged by the women's group are to increase savings in the group fund, organize training for other women's groups (in consultation with SC office), be involved in community development activities such as cleaning roads, wells and other public places, and to teach other women in the community how to prepare *jeevan jal*,[25] family planning concepts, and child care etc. Each month a meeting is held among the women and members of the group are expected to participate in it. The women are supposed to be involved in community development programs at least once in a month.

SAVE offers a number of programs but all are not provided to all group members, most are provided only to a selected few who then are supposed to disseminate the information more widely in the group. These programs are sponsored by the Save the Children US with the program organizing agencies in various areas and the participants who are to attend are chosen from the local group by the women themselves. This way group strategy is maintained throughout the working process of the program.

The women in this village have received training in: leadership management, *sarbottam pittho*[26] making, kitchen gardening, paralegal training, goat raising, and sewing, painting, buying and selling. The women receive training in the area of their interest and as it is relevant to their work. It is anticipated that they disseminate their knowledge in the group to facilitate the other women in the group.

Some of the members of the women's group also have participated in a tour program organized by the Save. They visited Pokhara, Gorkha, Janakpur, and met other women's group of that region and saw different projects running in those districts. This was a good opportunity for women to understand other people and their culture. It was evident in discussion with the women that the tour program was a practical experience enabling women to compare and contrast each other's way of life and hence change their way of thinking.

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[25] A Nepali name for oral rehydration solution.

[26] local home made cereal made out of various cereals and beans

Summary

With this discussion of the Nepali context and the situation in the field, the Bhawanipur Village Development Committee of Siraha district in the *terai* of South-Eastern Nepal, and the place of the Save the Children US project in the community, the next chapter will turn to the data gathered from the women themselves as I discussed literacy and their lives with them. It is this chapter which begins to answer the research question, the meaning of empowerment in the women's lives and whether or not literacy may be seen as contributing to their empowerment.

Chapter 6

Women and their Periphery

Background

The literacy and income generation program for women in a cluster of Bhawanipur village, that included women mostly from ward number 3, was organized by Save the Children USA. The main objective of the program was to empower women through a literacy and income generation program, where literacy was the entering point for the total activity. The women had to take two courses before beginning the income generating program: one six month's basic literacy course, and another six month's advanced course. After completion of these courses women were encouraged to form a group and do an income generation program where they raised Rs.100 per head and Save added 75% in that amount to start the activity.

At first, in the basic literacy course, women from three different ethnic communities had joined the class: the Choudhari (Tharus), the Saha (Telis), and the Mandals (Khatwes). Since only married women were allowed in the women's group and income generating program the unmarried girls were dropped after completing the literacy course. Most of the unmarried girl participants were from the Khatwe community. These young girls participated in the program following consultation with their parents and with the insistence of the facilitator. As no married women from the Khatwe community participated in the literacy course, no woman from this community was represented in the women's group which formed the core of the study. So, the women in the group were from the Choudhari and Saha community only.

The women mostly were above 30 years of age (except two) and had joined the class on their own will and with the consent of their family members. They mostly were the head of the family (except the younger two), and so had little problem in making this decision on their own. Women from the younger age groups, especially the *buharis* (daughters-in-law) still have problems joining classes because they have so little time due to their household chores and small babies. Apart from this they have to get consent from their elders and even if they get it, they often have to leave the program due to their work burden and babies. Two of the *buharis* had already left the program after a few months for this reason. The two younger women who had been able to stay with the program and joined the group had strong family support and received help in doing their income generating activity, just as they received help with their literacy classes. In this chapter the

description of the women in the case study is presented with a thematic presentation of data regarding their experiences in the literacy program.

Description of women in the case study

Saudamini

Saudamini was born in Madhubani district of Bihar in India in a middle class family. She was married at the age of 11 or 12 (she could not tell exactly), remaining with her parents for four or five years, after which she was sent back to her husband's home. She gave birth to the first child at the age of 18 and she is now 45 years of age.

She was married to a poor extended family and she and her husband separated from it after 10 years. She was given 14 *katthas* of land in separation. She was the eldest daughter-in law and had to do quite a lot of the household work. Now she is in a single family with her husband and 3 children, 2 sons and 1 daughter. The first son has education up to certificate level and quit when he could not pass the exams. He tried to find a job but could not get one and works in the farm and looks after animals. He is married and has two daughters. The second son is studying in grade 9, and owns a bicycle shop near the school. He started the shop with a loan from the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB). The daughter is studying in grade 6.

Her husband has some schooling but mostly works in the farm and looks after the animals. She herself owns a small grocery shop in the village which was established on her own initiative before joining the literacy class. She does marketing of food grains as an income generating activity.

She joined the literacy class of her own volition. According to her she was very much interested to learn read and write and do more mathematics so that she could keep her accounts clear. She works in her shop so she thinks the knowledge of mathematics is very important for her. Besides that she felt that literacy would help her to learn more and help her lead a better life.

She is engaged mostly in keeping her shop. Her involvement in the income generation program has helped her to do more business. She is dealing with the buying and selling of food grains as her income generation program. Before that she had a small grocery shop of oil, chocolates, cigarettes etc. in the village in her own house. Now she is doing her business from this same shop and she only occasionally goes to market to sell or buy things if needed.

She is the mother-in-law, which is why she is almost free from household chores. She helps a bit in the kitchen if the daughter-in-law is busy with other work. She takes care of her grand daughters and takes care of her shop. She has composed a few poems after the literacy class and has also won prizes in two or three occasions. She is the secretary of the group.

Kamala

Kamala was born into a middle class family in Bastipur village of Siraha district in Nepal, which is about 10km. from Bhawanipur. She was married into a middle class family at the age of 11 or 12 and after 5 or 6 years came to her husband's home. She gave birth to the first child at the age 20 and is now age 34. She has two children, the first is a son who is studying in grade 8 and the second is a daughter who is studying in grade 6. She was eldest daughter in the family, and the youngest daughter-in-law. She is married into an extended household, with five brothers and their families living together. There are 30 people in the household who eat from the same kitchen.

Her father is a *Jamindar* (landlord) and owns 30 *bighas* of land. She did not get an opportunity to acquire an education because there was no system of educating the daughter at that time, although all her brothers were educated. One of her brothers is an engineer. Now all her nephews and nieces including her younger sister have been given an opportunity to do education.

Her husband was an engineer who was killed by the Indian dacoits when he was on a job in the far Western Development Region of Nepal when her daughter was still in the womb. After that she moved in with the extended family and continued to stay there providing her labour in the household.

She joined the literacy class of her own volition and with the consent of her family. She said she was very much interested to join the literacy class and to learn to read and write. It was her feeling that without literacy she was in the dark and literacy would open her eyes. She says she has learned quite a lot in the class and has developed much more self confidence. She was very shy and confined to the household before she joined the literacy class, but now she feels that she has acquired some courage to fight against the evils in the society. Her knowledge about women's rights has been a great help.

She is doing marketing of food grains, including food processing in the income generation program at present. She is doing this business with the help of her two other sisters-in-law who had also taken part in the literacy program. She is also raising goats as

her own personal income generation activity. She intends to earn more money to educate her two children.

She is the youngest (last married into the family) daughter-in-law in the household and is engaged mostly in the household chores. She prepares the morning breakfast for the family members everyday. The other sisters-in-law take turns preparing mid-day and evening meals every week. In her spare time Kamala does her income generation activities. She is the president of the group and often visits the head office and bank to deposit the group money. She is a very busy woman.

Sakalani

Sakalani was born in a lower middle class family in Loharpati village of Mahottari district in Nepal adjacent to Bihar, India. She was married at the age of 12 into a poor family. She has three children, 2 sons and 1 daughter. The first son is 16, the second is 14 and the daughter is 12. The first child was born when she was 16 years of age. All the three children go to school. The first son has taken the School Leaving Certificate Examination (SLC), the other two are in grades 8 and 6 respectively.

She was also married in an extended household and continued to live there till the death of her father-in-law. She got 14 *katth*as of land in separation. Her husband has some schooling but does farming. He is also engaged in the marketing business and he supports his wife in her income generation activities.

Her parents were small farmers with 2-3 *bighas* of land. All her brothers and her younger sisters were able to obtain an education. One of her brothers is a veterinary doctor. She says there was no system of educating a daughter in her time but since the last 20 years the daughters are also getting an opportunity to receive an education.

She joined the literacy class on her own will. She was very much interested to join the class and learn to read and write. She thought that literacy would improve her life by enabling her to learn various things. At first her husband had not agreed to it. He objected that she had no use of education as she had to work in the kitchen and household anyway, and she was not going to hold a job. Even the women in the neighbourhood laughed at her when she first went to join the class, she said. But she went to join the class even so, and now her husband is pleased with her and helps in her income generation activities.

She is doing marketing of food grains in her income generating program and has also bought a buffalo from the group loan adding a bit of her family property. Now she

also sells the milk and makes some money. She often goes to the market place to sell her food grains. She is the treasurer of the group so often goes to the bank to deposit the money in their group account. She also has to go quite often to the Save office for various reasons.

She is mostly engaged in her household chores and looking after animals. She gets little help in these things from her family members as her children go to school and her husband goes to work in the farm or to do his business. She is quite busy, however she manages to get some spare time to do her income generation program and group work.

Drupa

Drupa was born in a middle class family in Bhagwatipur village in Madhubani district in Bihar, India. She was married at the age of 15 into a lower middle class family. Her first baby was born at the age of 22 (she had complications of pregnancy and had a few miscarriages). She has 3 daughters. The first girl is 14, the second 12 and the third 8 years old. All of them go to school in grade 9, 6, and 3 respectively. Drupa herself is 36 years old now.

She is the only daughter of her parents. She had been to school for a few years but left the school because the teacher beat her. Her parents own a small grocery shop to make a living.

She was married to a medical practitioner, who was by himself with his uncle when she was married. She with her husband owns only 10 *kattha* of land and their main support is her husband's income. As she was the only woman in the household she had to do all the household chores and look after the animals too. Her husband did not stay at home most of the time due to his work.

She joined the literacy class of her own will and with the insistence of her friends. Her husband also encouraged her to participate in the program. In the beginning, she felt awkward to go in the literacy class as she felt quite old to study. But with all the friends in the group she was soon able to overcome her inhibition. Now she feels that she has learned quite a lot and literacy has been able to change her perspective. She has realized the importance of education for girls and says that she will allow her daughters to study up to the SLC level.

She is doing goat raising as her income generation program, having taken a loan from the group fund. She has also borrowed to raise an ox after paying back the first loan.

She wants to do more goat raising and marketing of food grains. But she says it is difficult to raise animals as there is no pasture land or source of grass near-by. She expresses her feeling of constraint at not being able to do both as she is alone and has to do all the household chores.

She is mostly engaged in household work and looking after the animals. Her daughters help a bit in the kitchen but as they go to school for the most part she has to do it all by herself. Her health is not good so she cannot work hard. Her husband has to travel quite often and hardly remains at home due to his medical practice. She is a member in the group.

Godavari

Godavari was born in a lower middle class family in Pararia of Siraha district near Lahan about 10 kilometer from Bhawanipur. She was married at the age of 10 to a lower middle class family. She came to live with her husband after only 5 years. She gave birth to her first child at the age of 29. He is just one year old and she is 30 years now.

Her father is a prosperous farmer. He owns 5 *bighas* of land and is a good farmer. He grows vegetables, paddy wheat, mustard etc. in his farm. He is able to meet the family needs and requirements by selling the crops and vegetables in the market.

They were only five sisters so her father married a second wife. Her *sani ama*[1] has one son and one daughter. Her father has studied up to grade 7. All her sisters and brother have some schooling including her elder sister although her elder sister was also married at the age of 9 to 10 years. Godavari was not interested to go to school when she was a child, but rather stayed home and helped with household chores. At that time she did not know the value of education and had no interest in it.

She was married to a single family as her husband was the only son; he had two sisters both of whom were married and had gone to their husbands' homes before she came to his house. Thus there were only three people other than herself in the household, her husband and his parents. They own 4 *bighas* of land which is more than sufficient for the family. Her husband has certificate level of education but is engaged mostly in the farm work. He mostly hires labour to do farming and he takes tuition from students wishing help with their studies and earns some additional money.

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[1] Literally sani ama translates as 'younger mother', and it is the term used by children of the first wife for their father's second wife

Godavari joined the literacy class of her own will. The family was also willing to permit her to join the class as she did not have her baby at that time. She was interested to learn to read and write and she was happy to join the class with her friends and to gain knowledge. She says that she did not know anything and was not concerned about many things before but now she is inquisitive about many things and wants to learn more. Now she likes to read books and wants to talk with other people so that she can learn more from them. She thinks that literacy has improved her ability to do things and deal with people in a better way.

She is doing goat raising with funds from the group loan. Her mother-in-law and husband mostly help in her income generating activities as she now has a small baby and has not been able to do much on her own. Her mother-in-law and husband work for her in her group program. She has not been able to make any private money and financial matters are taken care of by her husband.

She is mostly engaged in her household chores and looking after her baby. In her leisure hours she takes care of her goat or income generation program. She does not feel it is necessary to keep any private money as her husband has taken care of everything. She is a member of the group.

Sheela

Sheela was born in a poor family in Sukhipur village in Siraha district adjacent to Bhawanipur, about 3 km. from the study village. She was married at the age of 12 into a poor family. She came to her husband's home after 2 years of her marriage and gave birth to their first child after 5 years. She has 3 children, 2 daughters and 1 son. The son is the middle child. She gave birth to the first child at the age of 19 and the first daughter is already married. The son is studying at grade 9 and the younger daughter at grade 6. She is 40 years old now.

Her parents were poor and no one in her family could get an opportunity to do education. She was the eldest daughter and had to look after her brothers and sisters as well as graze cattle. They had only 5 *katthas* of land and survived mostly on wage earning.

She also married into an extended family but the family was separated after 3 years of her marriage. She got 10 *katthas* of land as her share when she was separated. Her husband is also illiterate, both of them work on the farm and go for wage earning.

She joined the literacy class when her friends told her about it. She felt that it would benefit her, as it would the other women. Her husband also allowed her to join the class. Initially, she had no idea of what she was going to learn in the class and was not quite comfortable. Later on she enjoyed it and did not miss any classes. Now she feels that she has learned quite a lot from the program and she says that she will allow her children to study as far as they are able. In her opinion literacy has provided her with more insights and developed a habit of meeting with more people. But she says that she received more benefit from her income generation program that followed the literacy, for it helped to alleviate her poverty to some extent.

She is raising goats from the loan she borrowed from the group fund. She has already paid the first installment and is now doing ox raising with the second funds borrowed from the group fund. On top of it she also does some marketing of food grains and processed food. Both the husband and wife do this business side by side, her husband helping her carry food grains to the market while she sells it. He also sells at the market when she is unable to go; both of them are equally engaged in these activities. She is a member of the women's group.

She is engaged mostly in her household chores and looking after the animals. She gets only a little help from her children in these matters as they go to school. Her husband also looks after the animals and the farm. Sheela also does farm work going to work on other people's farms for wages. Both of them mostly work together but the household chore is her job alone. She is a very busy lady and gets hardly any time to rest.

Thematic presentation of data; before the literacy class

Women's life experiences

The cultural differences between the two groups did not seem to be reflected in the literacy impact on their lives, as women in both the groups had more or less the same experiences. The Choudhari women seem to have more freedom than the Sahas, but the life they led at their natal place and at the home of their husband's family presented a similar picture.

Almost all of the women presented the view that they were taken good care of at their parent's home where they had not much work to do. Whereas soon after their marriage they found themselves in a different situation with a lot of household chores to do, and very little help to do them. While they were of a very young age, 14 - 16, they found it a great burden to do all these things. They described it like this:

I was married into a poor family. My father-in-law and mother-in-law both were alive at that time. I was supposed to do a lot of work, although my mother-in-law gave a hand in the kitchen a bit. I was the eldest daughter-in-law in the household so I had to do a lot of work by myself. You cannot ask help with the mother-in-law always. When my brother-in-law got married then only did I get help from my devrani ; then it was a bit easier. My husband has 2 brothers (2 younger than him, one is Sakalani's husband). I had to work in the kitchen mostly and to look after the animals a bit. We don't work in the field for wages, so I did not go to work in the field but I had to do lots of cooking at the time of cultivation and harvesting for the hired labour. We also use labour for farm work. (SD)[2]

I was the only daughter in my parent's home and so I had to do nothing. But I was married at the age of 15 and came back to my husband's home after 2 years and had to do all household chores. I was a pampered child and did not do anything at my maiti *but that privilege did not last long. I had to do all when I was married. Soon after marriage, I had to do all the household chores. But I did not mind because I thought every woman had to do the same. When I was married there were three of us, my husband, me and his uncle. I used to work in the kitchen and household and also look after the cow-shed, cleaning and feeding etc. It was really difficult for me to do all these things alone as I was the only woman in the household and the men do not share the kitchen work. (DS)*

When I was married my father-in-law was separated (from his extended family) and there were only my father-in-law, my mother-in-law and my husband. He also has two sisters, both are elder to him and they were already married when I came here. Though there was no compulsion I had to get up early to do the morning jobs: cleaning the house and other chores. I had to do nothing at my parents' place and here also I did not have to face problems regarding the mother-in-law/ daughter-in-law relation. My mother-in-law is very gentle. She helps in many things. We never have a fight. But still a buhari *is a* buhari *I couldn't wait to see my* sasu *(mother-in-law) working being the only* buhari *in the household I had to do a lot of work. Since I gave birth to this baby (she was breast feeding her one year old son) I am busy looking after him so my* sasu *helps quite a lot in the kitchen and outside. (GC)*

For all these women, the cultural norms and the age old traditions seem to be a barrier to their education, for their brothers and other family members had been able to go to school. Only Sheela had a different story than the rest. Unlike others, she belonged to a very poor family who mainly lived on wage earning. She had been engaged in lots of work since her childhood and could not attend any school. None of her family members, even the sons, ever got a chance to education. She says:

My parents had only 5-6 katthas *of land. I used to look after the buffalo and collect fodder in my maiti. I also had to look after my younger brothers*

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[2] Initials are used here to indicate the name of the speaker, SD is Saudamini; DS is Drupa, GC is Godavari, SC is Sheela, KC is Kamala, and SK is Sakalani.

and sisters when my parents went for wage earning. No one in our family got a chance to education due to poverty. I was married at the age of 11 or 12 and after two years of marriage I came home (to her husband's home).

My elder daughter was born after 5 years. I was 16 or 17 at that time. I had to do all the household chores. All the brothers were together at the time of my marriage. But we were separated after 3-4 years of marriage and I had to do a lot. We got only 10 katthas *of land as our share. We do various crops in there: rice, barley, oil seed, potato etc. rotation-wise. It is not sufficient for the total so we go for wage earning. I get either Rs.25 or 3kg. of barley or rice or wheat equivalent of money per day for wages. I have to work from 6 AM to 7 PM in the field and the household chores are all mine. (SC)*

As girls' education was not given priority most of the women were married at a very young age, although they were not sent to the household of their husband for 4 or 5 years after marriage; it was up to the groom's family to decide when to send for them after they were married. The mean age of marriage among the women was 12 years[3] and they were brought to the *ghar* after 4 or 5 years[4] of their marriage and from then remained there for ever. The age of the first baby for most of the women was 16 to 18 years, except for two who had late conception. Most of the women began their early work at 5 o'clock in the morning cleaning the household, preparing the food, looking after the cattle and other animals, cleaning their sheds, and going to the field for work except the Saha women and the new *buharis* among the Choudharies. Saha women do not go to work on the farm, they hire others for this purpose as they have a higher or more demanding *purdah* system than the Choudharies. But they do run shops and go for shopping to the market.

In an extended family the work described above is shared among the others. In one of the households I observed about 30 people eating from the same kitchen and the work was divided among the 5 daughters-in-law. One prepared morning *nasta or jalkhai,* another prepared *Khanna*[5] another prepared the evening meal, another went to the farm and

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[3] The age of the respondents was calculated on the basis of their age at marriage and their age at first baby. As there was no system of keeping the birth record at that time the women could not tell their real age. It was estimated on the basis of their information.

[4] Previously women used to get married as early as the age of 10 to 12, so they would stay at their parent's place until they were grown up which would be 4 or 5 years later. But at present, when they are mostly married at the age of 15 to 16, they do not stay in the maiti as long. Depending on the family agreement they may go to their husband's home within a year or maybe wait sometimes 1 or 2 years, and sometimes longer. This first time they go to their husband's home is called duragaman/gauna and is celebrated with great festivity.

[5] Khanna is either lunch or evening meal. It is served with rice lentil vegetables and pickle.

the elder one looked after the other affairs of the household. Kamala relates her experience in her extended household in the following way:

> *I was married at the age of 11 or 12 and after 4-5 years came to live with my husband after* gauna. *After then I was loaded with the household chores. I had to work in the kitchen and had to look after the children of my* jethanis *also. I was the youngest of all so I had to do what they asked me to do. I worked hard to please everyone at home, as my husband was away for his study and I had not given birth to any child at that time I could do a lot of work. When I gave birth to my children then I got to look after them on top of it. I however did not go to work in the field in the beginning but I do go to work in the field sometimes these days. I did not work at all at my parents home, only sometimes to help my mother. It is really difficult to be a daughter-in-law, at your parents' home you get lots of love but here you get only words if you are not able to meet their expectations.*
>
> *These days I mostly prepare the morning* jalkhai. *We are five daughters-in-law and the work is divided. We also have a big farm, altogether about 15* bighas *so we need to go and do the farm work also. We three, the third, fourth and fifth* buharis *take turns for the field work. We also have one mango garden and a pond for fishery and our mother-in-law goes to guard it during the day time. (KC)*

In an extended household in which the work is divided among the members of the family even if some are doing more than the others the household is run smoothly and without any fighting for day to day activities. The grand daughter-in-law in this household does the cleaning of the household and looks after the young ones and works at the school.[6] Some Choudhari women who own a little or no land go for wage earning, but most of the women's time is passed in the household.

All but one of the women said that they had a little or nothing to do in their natal home whereas soon after their marriage they were loaded with the burden of household labour. Nobody said that they enjoyed married life; for them it was a burden and it was a result of being born female and also being illiterate. They related that it was simply their fate as women that they have to do all these things. Had they been men, they would have been different and would have enjoyed life as did their brothers. But now they have realized that they were not treated well at their parents home - both by being a daughter and then by not getting an opportunity to acquire an education.

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[6] She was the only grand daughter-in-law in the household. In this family which is a Choudhari family, the grand daughter-in-law is a teacher in a primary school in the village. Her husband is also a teacher in Hitauda south of Kathmandu about a half a day journey by bus from this place. Three of the daughters-in-law were the participants in the literacy class from this household, and the facilitator was the daughter of one of these three women.

Women's perception towards education

Education was not a new concept for women as they had already seen their brothers going to the school. Although the sons were sent to the school, the daughters were not. At that time they were too young to understand why they were not sent to school. They used to think that only the boys needed education as they have to hold a job and support the family. They thought that women should go to her husband's home and do the household chores. They said that no one talked about educating a daughter at that time. No women from their community had ever been to school although there were quite a few of them going to school from other communities. Another factor they said was that parents hesitated to send their daughters to a co-education school. It is only about 20 years since girls have been sent to school. Sakalani relates:

> *My elder brother is a veterinarian. My younger brother is studying in grade 9. My younger sister is also studying. I didn't get a chance to study. There was no system of girl's education in my time. It is twenty years to now since girl's have been getting an education. (SK)*

She says that there was a feeling in the family that the sons are family assets and need education to support the family. But now the time is changed and even the girls can do as much as the boys. She feels that her daughter should also get an equal chance to education as her sons.

Kamala has the same feeling, rather she is more determined that her daughter should be a doctor and her son an engineer. She has seen an educated community around her and cannot neglect her daughter as did her parents. She says:

> *I don't differentiate between my children. Let my daughter also study as much as she could. My niece is a doctor and my brother is an engineer. My daughter can also be a doctor and she can find her own way. She will choose her husband by herself. I am not bothered about that, let her study well....You know one of my brother-in-law's daughters is very good at her studies. There is nothing that she does not know. If you ask a question she answers so quickly. I envy her. Now the time has changed. Girls also get an equal chance to education, not like us. I used to think that I will allow my daughter to study up to SLC but now I think she should study as much as she could. (KC)*

> *I had to do a lot of the household chores since I was married. I got only a little time to do other work. I was not allowed to go to school only because I was a girl. My parents did not feel the importance of education for a daughter. They said "what would a girl do after education? She will be doing the kitchen work and look after the children anyway. She is not going to be a boss." In this way they humiliated me just for being a daughter. Now I feel if I had an opportunity I would not have this much trouble. I would have led a different life. I didn't know it before because I felt all women have the same fate and do the same thing. Look at you how*

could you do this much, because you are educated. Now I can talk with you as I know your language a little but otherwise how could I have talked with you? But now I realize, how conservative my parents were. Look at you and me how different we are. Is it not education that made difference? (SD)

Drupa says education is a must for the daughters also. She regrets that she dropped out of school and now wants her daughters to be educated. In her opinion SLC is enough for the daughters. More than education a daughter still needs to learn manners, she illustrates:

I have three daughters and they all go to school. I will allow them up to SLC but they don't like to work. Even though they are girls, they are "unsociable" (Do not have good qualities). I wonder how she is going to do in another's house? If they could study well I will manage for their higher education. (DS)

Sheela observes that education could help to uplift the economic situation and that is why she is educating her children. Although she is giving an equal chance of education to both her son and daughter she feels that boys should be able to earn after education. In her view girls' education has also become necessary as everyone goes to school these days. As there is no cost for educating the girls why not give them a chance for education? She says:

All my children are going to school. I want to educate them as far as I can. I suffered a lot and I don't like them to lead the same life. My husband is also illiterate. We both feel our children could do something if they could study well. I am also providing tuition for them besides the school studies so that they could do well in their class. The tuition fee is Rs.15 for grade 3-5 and Rs.5 for grade 1 and 2 per month. In our time there was no system of schooling; even the boys rarely had a chance of education. But now schooling is available to everyone and almost everybody goes to school. It is difficult to get a job in the village these days and one has to go different places to find a job which is possible only for an educated person. For a poor family like us, it is even necessary as we have not enough land and property. I think the children can do something if they are educated. At our time it was different, no one talked of educating a girl but now all are sending their daughters to school. Since there is no tuition fee for the girls up to grade 10, I can allow my daughter to continue her studies up to that level if she can make it. (SC)

All of the women have now realized that education is necessary for both the boys and the girls, but most of them still feel that boys need to do better and go for higher education. They feel that because there is no more prospect of a job in the village and the boys need to go somewhere to find work. For the girls they still feel education is necessary but not as much as for boys. Only one woman whose parental family was well educated expressed a desire to send her daughter to higher education. She preferred her

daughter to be a doctor as was her niece. Her feeling was that if given a chance the girls could do equally as well as the boys or better.

Although most of them said they would allow their daughters as far as they could the maximum aspiration was SLC. They still hesitated to send their daughters away from home and there was no provision of a higher level of schooling near by. They have to send their daughters either to Lahan or Siraha for it, and there is no hostel facility for girls in any of these areas or in any parts of the country for undergraduate level studies. They still feel it is not secure for girls to stay away from home. Apart from this women also feel there is an age limitation for the girls to be married. They thought that girls should be married within 18 to 20 years of age or it would be a problem for them to find a good house. It is difficult to find a groom when a girl exceeds this age as most of the boys would already have been married by the age of 25. Although the boys can continue their studies after marriage, it becomes very difficult for a girl to continue her education after marriage. Once she is married she has to take the household responsibility. Apart from this, there are fewer job opportunities for women in the vicinity except for a teacher and that is highly competitive.

In my study site the facilitator was an SLC and was married to one of the household in Saptari. Her husband was studying in Rajbiraj campus while she could not do so as the family did not allow it. She could ask her parents to help her continue her education in the same campus with her husband while staying with him. But the husband does not feel comfortable to study with his wife in the same campus because he fears he will be teased by his friends. All she had been able to do was take classes in typing from her parents home in Lahan for a short while.

All these economic and cultural constraints make parents reluctant to provide higher education for girls even though the parents and girls may desire it. Yet, all of the women believed that the time has changed now and girls also need education. In their opinion, when even they felt the need of education in their old age why should their daughters not get this opportunity while young? Even if they did not get a chance to hold a job at least they will not regret just being illiterate, as do their mothers.

Women's explanation of their illiteracy

In every case the women associated their lack of literacy with the lack of opportunity to attend school, and in general the lack of opportunity of daughters or girls to attend school. Their experience showed that the parents were reluctant to send their

daughters to school. Some of the women belonged to well-to-do families but even so they were not given equal opportunity to education when compared to their brothers. Women possessed different views in this regard. Some blamed their parents as being responsible for their career, others said there was no system of educating the girls while some other said that they themselves were not interested in going to school. For example, one woman blamed her parents, describing her situation this way:

> *My parents are rich. They have a big shop and a big house with four rooms and a toilet in it. But they did not allow me to go to school. They said:*
>
> *Beti ke padhake kathi karte, akhir chula phuke padte, jagir ta nahi khetai.*/ What's the need of education to a girl, anyway she is going to work in the kitchen, what if she has got a degree she is not going to hold a job.
>
> *I did not know the value of education then, had they given me the chance to education I would have done a lot. They did a great mistake by not giving me a chance to education. (SD)*

This woman had received prizes on several occasions for her performance. Once she came first in the literacy class final exam and got a dinner plate and a glass; second, she got a bowl for being first in another competition and on the third occasion she received a plate and a spoon for being second. These prizes and the recognition seemed to provide her with great enthusiasm to learn more. She owns a small grocery shop in the village and wants to learn more mathematics so that she can keep her accounts well and would be more knowledgeable in calculation. She says it is difficult for her to count bigger amounts.

One of the poems she composed in Maithili was about a literacy program where she appreciates literacy by saying that it would bring consciousness among people and make them better of. The poem goes like this:

Maige bad bad gun chhai Nepal gyan bigyan me
Saksharata Abhiyan me na.
Ga-ga ranga biranga ke geeta, lelak sabahak manke jeet
Padhbai jaichhai ghar-ghar mastar sanjh bihan me
Saksharata Abhiyan me na.
Padh aa bachcha budh juwan, pitlak padhai likhaike danka
Badhait bidya anapadha gyan ke milan se
Saksharata Abhiyan me na.
Je nahin padhalak bhel kangal, dekhahin tol padosak hal
Sabta sudharat jakhanahi mastar jeta gaam me
Saksharata Abhiyan me na.

Jod diyau saksharata par jor, jor lagau samajak utthan me
Saksharata Abhiyan me na.

(Translation)

Nepal has achieved a great success in literacy campaign;
Now people sing various songs regarding education.
The teacher goes house to house to teach.
All the people, old and young talk about literacy,
They believe that literacy provides knowledge.
Now people have realized that education can change their lives,
By alleviating poverty, and making them aware.
When the teacher goes to village and teaches the people,
It will help in social upliftment.
Let us put our effort in our village development,
By taking part in the literacy campaign.

Some other women's perceptions were revealed in the following fashion:

My parents are Jamindars *and own 30* bighas *of land. At that time there was no system of educating a girl but now all my sister*[7] *and brothers are educated. One of my brothers is an engineer and one of my niece is a doctor. The time is changed now everybody goes to school. I was married at the age of 11 or 12 years and I did not know the value of education then. Now I feel had I been educated I would not have had to face such problems. (KC)*

I had been to school for sometime but I left the school because the teacher beat me, but then nobody insisted that I go to school as my parents said "after all you will have to take care of the kitchen why bother about schooling." (DS)

All my brothers and sisters went to school except me. I was not at all interested to go to school, rather I liked to work. I was really ignorant then. (GC)

I could not go to school because my parents could not afford it. I had to look after the animals or do the household chores as they went for wage earning. I had small brothers and sisters and had to look after them. (SC)

Most of the women belonged to a middle class or lower middle class family in their parent's home and had access to a near-by school but could not get the opportunity to do

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[7] By sisters she meant her younger sisters who were 10 to 15 years younger than her. She was the eldest daughter in the family and girls were not sent to school in her time, as she said.

education only because girls' education was not regarded as that important then. Only for one woman did the economy seem to be the barrier to education. One other woman reflected economics as a factor when she said: "at our time education was not free as today and also it was not thought important for girls to be educated so nobody got a chance for education. Today everyone goes to school." They all said that now their younger brothers and sisters go to school because the time has changed now and it is surprising if one does not go to the school.

Access to the literacy class

These women had never thought of learning literacy skills and the value of it in their lives. As they said it was the Save the Children USA that made the literacy class available for them, otherwise it was not possible. Some of them said in the beginning it was difficult for them to decide what to do, to some it was difficult to convince their family members but later on it was well accepted by both the women and the family. They described their access to the literacy class as follows:

> *I did not know anything about it. The Sirs (Program Officers) from the Save came to our village, they discussed about the program. We, who were interested were called. First we talked among ourselves who were interested to join the program. We convinced some of our friends, and we made 25 people in the group and started the class. We chose our* mastarni *(female teacher) by ourselves, we chose Pratima as our teacher. She also agreed to teach us. So we began the class. (SD)*

> *The Sirs from the Save came to organize the program. They asked the women who were interested to join the program. At first I did not know what to say although I was interested to learn how to read and write, I could not say so in the beginning. I was scared to talk to them. Our* Jethaju *is the village chairman, so he gave three of our names from our family (all daughters-in-law) who did not know to read and write at all. Two of the elder* jethanis *(daughters-in-law) did not want to join the class because they were not interested. About 25 women were collected who showed their interest in joining the class. We were asked to choose our* mastarni *by ourselves then we chose Pratima, my* jethaju's *daughter as our teacher. After we started the class. (KC)*

For many women literacy meant nothing in the beginning but they were happy to join the class. Later on they realized that literacy was essential for everyone to broaden their understanding. They continued to describe how they became involved:

> *First of all, it was organized by Save's office. Women from the village were called and asked to join the class but only a few of us could join the program. In the beginning some people ridiculed us. Even my husband said "Why do you need to learn to read and write at this age? Are you going to join any service?" He was not convincing and I went to the class on my*

own following my friends, I was very interested to learn read and write and I enjoyed it.

At first I felt as if I was doing it against others. But in the class we enjoyed it. It was difficult to learn at first but later when we learned some, we were enthusiastic. It was our zeal to learn and we could manage with all the burdens. Otherwise how could we have done it? (SK)

The sirs *from Save had come to organize the class. They asked us whether we were interested or not. They asked us to choose our teacher. In the beginning we did not know what were we doing in the class, but when all insisted that we join the class and said, "it will help" then we joined the class. Now we feel how ignorant we were then. (DS; SC)*

I was interested to learn to read and write. When I knew that Save was organizing the program for us I did not want to lose this opportunity. When there were so many women interested to join the program, I was happy to be one of them. (GC)

The experiences of these women revealed that most of the women had little or no idea what literacy would provide for them. They only hear and know from the people around them that a woman does not need any education, what she needs is a good (economically better) family and a good husband. As they were married young they would hardly know what would be better for them. So it was obvious that the women's accessibility to the literacy class was possible only by the program initiation. Even so, it would have been difficult to arrange the program for women had not the community been aware of the value of education for women; this women's group happened to be the first enter point of literacy program in that community. Following this group, now there have been 5 or 6 classes running, one in each ward, and some women are in the process of forming a women's group after completing the literacy class. Now the women themselves approach Save's office with demands to organize a literacy program for them. For a year or so, the local club has been mobilized to organize literacy classes for women under the supervision of the Save the Children USA field office.

Thematic presentation of data; the literacy class and life changes

Women's experience in the literacy class

Women passed most of their time in their household chores, farm work, or looking after the animals. They believed it was their fate and nothing could change it. Most of the time they remained inside the household with only a few women going to the market for shopping or selling goods. They were hesitant to talk to a stranger and mostly hid their faces when they saw a stranger, especially a man. Because these were the types of

experiences which made up the women's lives, the program organizer[3] of the Save the Children US told me that it was very difficult to organize the first program for the women in this area. In the words of the program officer "Nobody in their family would allow their women to join the literacy class if it was organized outside the household. Then we began the class from within their own family, which we named a 'Mask' program. After a long journey we have been able to bring the women outside their homes and now they themselves prefer to study in a common place where they will have some relaxation from the household chores and chat with their friends." Women themselves described their participation in the literacy program in the following way:

> *First of all I didn't know what I was going to learn in the literacy class, but when everybody was ready I also went. (SC)*
>
> *I was interested to read and write and when the Save was organizing everything for us we went to join the class. (SD)*
>
> *We all discussed among ourselves and agreed that we were going to join the literacy class so we went to join the class. (KC)*

Women related that when they first went to the class people laughed at them. Some of them even said:

> *Budhia sab dibiya college jetai/* Look at the old women going to a lamp college.

According to the women the men used this phrase because they went to the evening class and studied under a lamp. Some also said:

> *Budh suga padtai ?/* Can an old parrot read?
>
> *Padh ke kathi kartai, jagir khetai?/* What are they going to do after studying, are they going to hold a job?

The women said that they were tired of listening to these types of comments among the men folk, but they continued their class. At first they were a bit hesitant but later they cared a great deal about the course and made it to the end. They explained their experience in the class as follows:

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[3]The program officers are Nepali, mostly Maithili speakers but not necessarily from the immediate area. In this area they are almost all men.

At first it was a bit difficult to understand the words in Nepali and also to read in Nepali was even more difficult for us. We asked the mastarni [9] *to explain to us in Maithili; then we were able to understand and got more interested in learning. We wanted to study in both the languages because we wanted to learn Nepali also. However, we mostly converse in our own language - Maithili. Whenever we found difficulties in understanding we asked her to explain. The teacher was just like our daughter so we did not feel any hesitation in asking her any question. She is the daughter of one of the participants although she acted as a real* mastarni *sometimes when we were not serious.*

We also cracked jokes in the class. Some made poems and recited them in the class. We had lots of fun too, the class was very interesting. Most of us did not miss any classes. Those who could not come in the class dropped out in the beginning. If we had to do something (so we could not go) we informed everybody and postponed the class. The class was in our own ward and a minute's walk for everyone, there was no trouble to inform everyone of a change even on the same day. It was very interesting to be in the class, we really enjoyed it. (All)

Saudamini explains her first experience in the class as follows:

The class was very interesting. At first we all were a bit hesitant, we felt shame to read in the class like children. It was very difficult to read and write and some of us really did not know how to hold the pencil. We laughed at each other. Then after, it was all right. We began to enjoy the class. I did not miss a single class. A few of the buharis *left the program because of their small babies. My own daughter-in-law had to leave the program due to the same reason.*

The facilitator also said that all of the women were very enthusiastic to attend the class. They had a great zeal to learn. She said that the women from the older group were more interested than the younger ones. They also could learn faster and better. It was not the case for everyone, but in general the older women showed more interest in the class. They still want to continue the class especially in mathematics. There were only a few lessons in mathematics which were not sufficient. They need more lessons on division and multiplication, she further added.

The reasons for the difference in age-related behavior might be that the women from the older age group belonged to a better educated family and already understood the value of education whereas the young girls belonged to a poor and illiterate family and did not know the value of learning to read and write and its use in their daily activities. These girls who mostly lived through wage earning and did not possess any land or cash would hardly

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[9] Mastarni is a local word for female teacher, which is a feminized form of the word 'master', the term for teacher.

get time to retain their skills which was also expressed in the interview with them. Another reason might be that the young girls did not feel they were getting the real benefit from the program, as were the older women who were taken into the income generation activities after the literacy program.

Women said that literacy class was a new experience for them which they had never thought of. Now with the experience of these women who were the first group in the village, many women have shown an interest in joining the literacy program. Nevertheless, they conceded that the income generation program that followed literacy was the point that attracted to join the literacy program, rather than the literacy program itself.

Literacy brought change in their way of thinking

Women related that literacy has brought a great change in their thinking. At first they regarded women's field of activity as only in the household, but later they felt they can do so many things by themselves. They said, "it is the knowledge that opens your eyes and you feel you are also capable of doing things that other people do." They explained:

> *Had we not joined the literacy class would we have met you? Could we talk with you? It is a great pleasure that we have been able to talk to you. It is only due to our participation in the literacy class that we are able to think of ourselves in a better way and capable of doing something. (All)*

> *I want to learn more and more. I want to learn more Nepali so that I can speak well with others. I envy the hill women with how smart they are; how they sing and dance. They are not hesitant at all. I wish I could do as well. I feel I am a different person now. I used to hesitate to go out, to talk with people. I was really* Jungalee [10]*you see. I did not talk much. I had no where to go also. Now I need to go to the bank, do my buying and selling etc. Had not I learned to read and write I could not have talked with you. (She looks at me with despair). I would not have met you at all. (KC)*

> *I want to learn more mathematics so that I can keep my accounts in a proper way. If there would be a class for math, that would be more helpful. I feel more confident than before. Now I feel that I was really ignorant before and did not know anything. Had I had an opportunity to go to the school I would have been a different person. Now I encourage everybody to be literate and join the literacy class. (SD)*

> *After I joined the class I realized how ignorant I was. Now I feel I still have to learn a lot. Literacy has opened my eyes. I want to educate my daughter as much as I can. I knew nothing and I had no ideas; now I think differently. My boundary was limited to the four walls of the household. Now I like to meet with people and want to know more from them. Had I*

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[10] The literal meaning of jungulee is behaving wildly, but it connotes a person who hides herself or himself from others, or hesitates to talk with others. It also means a person without manners.

not joined the literacy class, I would not have dared to talk to you Before the class I would ignore what was written in the book but now I feel my daughter should be educated too. But it would be difficult to send her outside and there is only SLC in the village. (SK)

Before going to the class, I had no zeal to do things, but now I feel I need to do something and I can do something because I don't have little children. They all are grown up and take care of themselves. I only have three daughters; now I feel there is no difference between a son and a daughter, rather a daughter is more affectionate and does not fight for the share. Then why should only the girls be kept away from the school? (DS)

Some of the women said they will allow their daughters to study as far as they could, while others thought SLC will be enough for girls. One of the women said her husband was an engineer and one of her brothers is also an engineer and one of the nieces is a doctor. She is determined to also educate her two children (one daughter and one son) as far as they could be educated. But she was not sure whether her family would let them continue their study, or whether they would help finance their study. Her husband[11] had died in an accident about 17 years previously and she has been in the joint household[12] of his family and is the youngest daughter-in-law. Her husband had left no property in her name, for he used to send his money home to the extended family account. Now she found out that one of her brothers-in-law has bought some land in his wife's name and she thinks most of her brothers-in-law have done the same. But they give her only some money when she requires it and she has to manage the rest on her own, which she brings from her *maiti* or from her own private earnings, now from the income generating activities. She is determined she will work as hard as she can for the education of her children. Her son is studying in a school from her *maiti* in grade eight while her daughter is studying at the near-by school from home. There is no problem until after they complete SLC as there is a high school in the village and the costs are little. But for the further study she has to send them either to Lahan which is 15 km. from there, or to Kathmandu or to India if they are to acquire a good education. Her husband died when her son was 1 year old and the daughter still in the womb. She spent only a couple of years with her husband while he was in job at Mahendra Nagar, far west of Nepal. At that time she did not know or care about the family matters but now she finds herself lonely in the household working for others. She says had she been educated she would not have to depend upon others. If

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[11] Her husband was an engineer. According to her, he was killed by some Indian dacoits while in job in the far west, Nepal

[12] In this joint family, the mother, all her five sons (now only four), and their family including the grandson and his family live together. In this household about 30 people eat from the same kitchen.

she separates from the joint family she will only get 3 or 4 *bighas* of land as her share. She plans to buy some land on her own for the future.

Another woman has three daughters and no sons. She has gone through the family planning operation and says she finds no difference in a son and a daughter. Her husband is a private practitioner and she had an infection so he has realized the need for her to stop having babies. She says both of them are satisfied with their daughters. She was convinced by her husband and she also got an insight from the literacy class that a son and a daughter make no difference but they have to be good individuals. She says girls are better than boys because they are more helpful and love their parents, and they do not fight for property rights also.

Literacy provided them with more knowledge

Women said that before going to the literacy class they had a little knowledge. But after the class they felt that they had learned a lot. First of all they learned how to read and write and hence are able to deal with various matters which they feared or hesitated to do before. They learned about personal hygiene, health and sanitation, family planning, preparation of *jeewan jal*, baby care and immunization, first aid treatment, animal husbandry, diseases related to the animals and their treatment, social evils such as drunkenness and women's battering, women's rights etc.

> *Before I hesitated speaking with people even in my language. Now I speak with the teachers in Save's office and discuss our problems. Now I feel great that I can read and write and can do some calculation on my own. I can help the kids in their reading. I can understand what is good and what is bad. I also have composed a few poems on literacy.*

Mai bap galti kelkai anpadh banaulkai re jan,
Re jan! beti re kahatai babu ghent kati lelkai re jan.
Manawa mora, chahundisa bauyelai re jan,
Re jan! sab mil hamra ke thakalak, bicha bajariye re jan.
Dege - dege lovi lutera, chor thakaharawe re jan
Re jan! sab mil hamara ke thakalaka, bich bajariye re jan.
Jaun ham padhwai likhwai, dui chari ghante re jan
Re jan! chhitakata gyan kiranwa, hetai sadinawen re jan.

(Translation)

Parents made a mistake keeping me illiterate,

The father cut my throat just for being a daughter.

My mind is restless, today

All cheated me in different ways.

There are cheats and thieves on all my way,

Who trouble me in different ways.

If only I could study two-four hours a day,

I could enrich and change my life with knowledge. (SD, A poem she learnt from a book in Maithili, published in India)

This woman is the secretary of the women's group. She was chosen because she did the best in the class and she is proud of it. She has composed a few poems on the importance of girls' education.

The women said it was very difficult to learn at first as they had to study in Nepali and they had little knowledge of this language. But later when they learnt it they found it easier to talk with other people and it also helped to expand their knowledge.

At first I could not speak with people. It was very difficult to speak in Nepali. Now I can speak with people even though I still have a problem in speaking I try it. It is a pleasure to learn Nepali, now I can read books, signboards, bus numbers etc. (SK)

Now I can read and write and do my work properly, no one can say that I am an ignorant woman as people used to say earlier. At first I felt I was hesitant but when I learned something; I was enthusiastic to learn some more. (KC)

I learned so many things. It was a pleasure to know how to read and write. Before I hesitated talking with strangers but now I can talk. We used to hide ourselves when we saw new faces but now I want to talk. It has made a great difference. I had no voice then and now I feel how backward I was. I learned so many things from the book about diarrhoea, Jeewan Jal *, family planning, and about women. Now I feel I was in complete darkness. I knew nothing. (SC)*

Women said that they gained more knowledge about healthful living, child care, immunization and family planning and so many other things which they had not known before. They said it will help them to use their knowledge in practice when needed, and they were happy to mention it. But as I visited them and walked around the village, this knowledge was not revealed in their practice.

In my observation in the field I found that one woman got cholera and nobody thought to give any kind of rehydration solution, rather they were giving her massage and

heating her as she had turned cold and was almost unconscious. Women would not listen to me when I told them to prepare *jeewan jal* and give it to her. At last the facilitator made some *jeewan jal* but the woman had turned pale and senseless. Women filled the small room to provide massage giving heat from cow dung making the room even more suffocating. At last a health assistant was called and he had to give about 10 bottles of saline water which did not help. She was still unconscious till the morning of the next day, and was taken to the hospital at Lahan 15 km from there. She had to be taken up to Dhangadi in a bullock cart and then in a bus.

People frequently used the pond water for washing dishes, cleaning clothes, bathing or swimming and bathing the buffalo, all from the same pond. And at the time when diarrhea was becoming epidemic nobody stopped doing this, even though most of them have a tube-well in their courtyard. They found it easier to do these things in a pond rather than from a tube well where it is hard work to pull the water. It was found that when they ate the fish from the pond they got diarrhea and cholera.

Even though women talked about child care and health, in my observation I found most of the children naked and playing in the dust, in the burning sun. One girl child was having severe diarrhea and she was not given either *jeewan jal* or any medicine. The mother-in-law who was the participant of the program said she forgot to buy it, but did not seem to take it seriously. Next time when I went to the field after a month the child was at the mouth of death. She was just a skeleton. Was it because she was a girl child? Because she was the second girl and the first girl was in good health, was this one being neglected by the mother? Although they said two daughters were enough, in the patriarchal society it would be hard to begin family planning with only daughters. I thought, had that been a boy would he have been neglected to that extent? It seemed there was a vast difference in the saying and doing.

None of the participants had toilets of any kind in their homes. Women used to go under the shade of a tree or bamboo[13] while men used to go to the creek side . Men carried water for cleaning while women did not, they said it is *laj* [14] to carry a *lohoti* [15] for a

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[13] Women usually go to the place where they can hide themselves. So most of the women go for toilet before dawn when most of the men would be in bed.

[14] Laj meaning shame.

[15] A small water pot that is carried to clean oneself after toilet.

woman. Instead they kept the *lohoti* at home and did the cleaning afterwards, or they might go to the stream or pond to take a bath and clean. Children did toileting in the open field wherever they like and young people followed the tradition of the older people. It was amazing for me that with this much awareness and self sufficiency they have not felt the need of a toilet. The woman of the house where I stayed told me that she will take some loan and make herself a toilet, but while I was there I was taken to some one's toilet in the neighbourhood. Still, some people in the village have modern toilets, a pan without flush system which requires that water be poured after toileting to clean it.

Most of the women I observed had at most three children and most of them had gone through family planning. But they had made those decisions about their family size before taking the literacy class. For one woman in the group however, the discussions in the literacy class and other influences had no effect as she was still in a family way with her fourth child, having three daughters. As she said her husband needs a son. According to my interview with the local leaders they had done a family planning campaign during the 60s, so many people seemed to be aware of the need for family planning long before literacy came to the village, but not all.

Literacy helped them to become economically independent

Most of the women said that they had been very much interested in learning literacy skills and gaining knowledge in various areas and they were satisfied with what they learned in their literacy class. But one of the expectations they had of education or learning was that it would give a woman the ability to earn and make herself independent as many others do in the village at present. In fact, the main attraction of the program was found to be the income generation and skill training program that followed the literacy class. Although a few women showed an interest to learn more, the majority of them had an interest in earning a living or making private money. The income generation and skill training programs were what provided continuity after the literacy program, and as such they could contribute to life long learning, but this was not the important thing for the participants.

These programs were provided after the initial literacy course, i.e. in the six months advanced course, so as to enable the women to generate their own income and be independent economically. Now each woman is doing some kind of income generating program individually or in the group. The activities they are involved in are goat raising, ox raising, selling and buying food grains and running a shop. They feel themselves more independent than before with their involvement in the income generation activities. The

women seemed to be more satisfied with their income generation and skill training program by getting both the income and skill side by side as a result of their participation in the literacy program. They said:

> *I have started doing the business on food grains. I buy rice, oil seeds, wheat etc. in harvesting time and sell them in the market. Sometimes I also sell from my home. I also have got a small shop. I have been able to expand a bit with the money I borrowed from the group account. Now I see many ways to earn money. From this shop I earn about 1000/- a month. I also make flour out of the wheat and sell in the market.*
>
> *I am also taking a sewing class at present. I plan to open one tailoring shop in the village and sew clothes for village women and children. I can make some money out of it. There are many ways one can make money.*
>
> *We also have earned a great deal in our group fund after participating in the IG program. We have a total of about 14000/- rupees in our group account. We have made this money working in the group. Once we did potato cultivation and earned Rs.750 and next time we did onion cultivation and earned Rs.800. We also sold tea and snacks during meetings and prize distribution programs in the village and earned Rs.341. We all have one feeling working in a group. We are planning to do fisheries in contract and have already talked to the village chief about it. We are also planning to do tree plantation in the village but we have not yet got the assurance from the village development committee. (SD)*

Saudamini was found to be more clever about income activities than other women. She had already installed a grocery shop in the village before she joined the literacy class. Literacy had helped her to do better in her business. Her desire was to learn more mathematics so that she could keep her accounts well.

The other women had also chosen areas for their income generation where they had some previous knowledge. They said literacy helped them to earn a living making them more knowledgeable and skillful. Some of the women explained their activities as follows:

> *I am doing goat raising myself, that is my personal business. The marketing business I do with my other* Jethanis *(sister-in-laws). Three of us who had taken part in the literacy program are doing this business together.*
>
> *I deposit Rs.22 every month, twelve for the group and 10 for my personal account. I had taken Rs.500 in loan in the first place. I paid back that money and took another Rs.500 again for my business and am doing my business. I have bought 7* Katthas of *land by selling my ornaments and from some profit from my IG program. (KC)*
>
> *I was engaged in the household chores and looked after the animals. I hardly went to the market before I joined the literacy class.*
>
> *I am engaged in most of the group works, in personal business and other social activities such as: cleaning of the village, processions etc. We also*

have plans to do tree plantation and do some more income generation program in the group. I am also engaged in the marketing of food grains.

Now I am learning painting, it has been organized by Save and I have to go to Golbazar to learn that everyday from 10-4 p.m. When I learn that I will teach the group. One of our friends (Sunjakumari) is learning sewing. We exchange our knowledge in the group. After the painting program, I want to make bedcovers and pillow covers and sell them in the market. I want to do that for others also, to make some money. (SK)

Unlike the other women, Drupa found an income generation activity a new experience. She had never been involved in any kind of business before nor had she hoped to do any as she felt the household chores were enough for her. In association with other women she also learnt to do something to generate income for her own expenditure. She says, now she finds herself satisfied when she has been able to earn some money on her own. She thinks that she has been learning various things after the literacy. In her words:

In the beginning I took a Rs.500 loan from the group and started raising goats. I sold the goat for Rs.1700 and have bought two goats for Rs.1100 and I have already returned the loan money. I want to do more but cannot do as there is no pasture land nearby. That is why I cannot raise more goats. I am thinking to do some marketing of food grains with my other friends.

Previously I had bought 1 goat and earned Rs.800. I have got a Khutruke *where I put my private money to save some. We have to deposit Rs.22 every month. I don't get much time because I am not well and cannot work hard. This income generation program is a new experience for me. I am learning from my friends how to earn more profit. (DS)*

Sheela explains that the income generation program had been a great help for her. She had little income from her farm and had to go for wage earning to survive. But now, she says her participation in the literacy program has helped to understand things in a better way and do her business well. Apart from raising animals, she has been dealing with the marketing business after the literacy class. It has helped a lot to raise her economic status; she says:

I took Rs.500 loan for the first time and started raising goats. I sold the goat for Rs.1600 and borrowed Rs.500 and bought an ox for farming, by adding a bit of our family money in that. I have to return the money in the coming year. Some of it I have paid already from my business. I make wheat flour and chiura *and* muri *and sell them in the market. I was also involved in the group activities and in the group we did potato and onion cultivation. We put the money in the group fund.*

We also worked in a group and made some money. Now I have bought an ox for Rs.3000 from the loan. I am paying back the money little by little and hope to pay all at the end of the year. I still work for others and also do some small business. They include buying unhusked rice and make chiura *or rice and selling in the market. I also make flour out of wheat and sell it in*

the market. It is giving some profit although I have to work hard for my living. (SC)

In their view the income generation activity has made them more smart and enthusiastic than before. Now they have a zeal to earn more and do their work more efficiently. They also have to deal with more people than before; so according to them they are learning how to deal with people through their business.

Apart from the income generation, two of the women were taking training in painting and sewing. They were given training in Golbazar and Lahan respectively with other women in the district. It had given them a chance to meet other friends and learn more from them. Sakalani who was taking the painting course had done a nice job. She now plans to sell them in the market and take orders from people. She will also teach the skill to the group and other women can follow her.

A few of the women were also getting sewing training in the ward club and a woman teacher was hired by the office of Save the Children for a period of one month. They were learning to sew women's clothing and baby wear by bringing their own clothes for training. One of them was planning to open a tailoring shop as there was none in the village.

These income generating activities also involved learning financial knowledge, such as how to borrow and lend money, and make use of credit to expand their group income and their private businesses. For example, one woman said:

When we knew how to earn money by taking the loan we did some work in the group apart from our personal business. We hired land from among us and did some vegetables.

They related that after the literacy class they raised Rs.100 from each member of the group which made 1100 in total. Save gave Rs.5000 to start the business. They took Rs.500 loan each to start a business and used it for their own interest, rather than with the group as a whole. Mostly they put the money on their own previous business, like running a shop, buying and selling food grains, raising goat or ox etc. They also did some income generating programs in the group; they mentioned potato cultivation, onion cultivation, selling tea and snacks after their class to the teachers (from Save) and village people. Now they have a balance of Rs.14000 in their joint fund.

All of them have paid back the first loan which they had to pay at the end of the year with 20% interest, and now some have taken Rs.4000, some Rs.2500, some 1000 according to their need for a loan. They will have to return the capital with 20% interest,

which goes to increase their total fund. Apart from this most of them save Rs.22 every month, Rs.10 for their personal account and 12 for the group account. Each woman has got a *khutruke*[16] for her personal savings of at least Rs.10 every month, or more if she can. Two of the women said they did not take the *khutruke* as they felt that they could not put money aside in this way as they could not keep a separate fund other than their own family savings. Both of their husbands were helping them in their program as they had small babies and were busy with household chores. So they said it was difficult for them to put the money every month as their own when they were getting everything from home. They feared it might create misunderstanding in the family. However they were depositing money for the group fund.

Only three women in the group, the president, the secretary, and the treasurer had so far opened their personal accounts in the bank and the rest were thinking of opening one by Apri, 1995. I[17], A few women mentioned their inability to keep their personal accounts due to the cause mentioned above and unavailability of time to go to the bank, as they have to go 15 km to either Lahan or Golbazar to deposit money, as there was no bank near the village.

Women enjoyed working in the group and they were planning to do some more business with vegetables and also fishery. They had already approached the village head to lease the local pond and do a fishery business from there. Working in the group like this helps the women who are weak and who cannot afford time. Those who could not contribute time on their own were sending their family members, mostly husbands or mothers-in-law, to work on their behalf.[18] Women seemed to be happy and enthusiastic about being involved in the income generation activities.

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[16] A piggy bank which was given to the women from the project to save some money for their own personal use and for the group fund. It was also to develop a habit of savings in them, as they would otherwise spend all income on family expenditures.

[17] The women planned to open their account in the bank in the month of April, which according to Nepalese Calendar will be the month of Baishakh, the Nepalese New Year

[18] Due to household chores two women had problems sometimes participating in their IG activities. The family members, especially the husband and the mother-in-law, helped them in their income generating program but they did not share their household burdens. The household chore is regarded as a more inferior job than the income-generating work and the daughter-in-law is supposed to do it at any cost.

Literacy develops critical thinking

Most of the women's experience revealed that in many ways they feel more confident now than before taking the literacy class. Before they were hesitant and limited to the household and had limited knowledge and did not know how to face the challenges they were having in the present technological world. They were remote from the developing world and did not think themselves a part of this world but rather a handicap, being ignorant of various knowledge sources. And they found illiteracy as the major handicap to their thinking differently. They never thought that they would be capable of participating in any outside activities. Now they feel that they are no less than the men who commented on them at first as ignorant women.

> *I knew nothing and I had no ideas, now I think differently. Now I realize oh! I was in the dark I knew nothing. My boundary was limited to the four walls of the household. Now I like to meet with people and want to know more from them. I would never have dared to talk to you before, but now I feel the more I talk with other people the more I can learn. (All)*

> *Now I can read and write, no one can call me an ignorant woman as they used to tease before. If somebody talks in that way I will immediately reply, "why are you telling me that, how do you think yourself better than me?" (All)*

One woman also has composed a poem, that attacks parents' attitudes favouring the boys and not giving the girls a chance to education.

> *Chal chal bahina padh likhal ka pothi panna ge,*
> *Bin padhne kew kam nai yetai jiwan jatai kona ge.*
> *Mai bap sab ghent katalkai ishkool jai nai delkai ge,*
> *Gharka kam kaj a khel ma jiwan byartha gamelkai ge.*
> *Beti banalaun bar dukh pailaun sahalaun boli tholi ge,*
> *Taruni banai san pahile samaj baithaulak doli ge.*
> *Jiwanak sukh dukh kuchh nahi janalaun dhailaun, chulahika kona ge*
> *Bina padhne kew kam nai detai.*
>
> (Translation)
> O! sisters let us go to learn read and write;
> It's difficult to deal without learning.
> Our parents cut our throat not sending us to school ;
> So we lost our time in vain, in household chores and play.
> We got lots of trouble being daughters and heard taunts,
> They put us on the bride's coach before our age,
> No one will give us jobs without learning,
> Just being confined to a corner of the kitchen. (SD)

Women shared the image of themselves which was reflected in a common saying about them in the village, a saying that implied they were illiterate and ignorant. Some of the proverbs they used were:

> *Nak nahi rahichhi ta bista khaichhi*/ An ignorant person has no sense of good and bad.
>
> *Maugi log kathi janaichci* / What do you womenfolk know?
>
> *Maugi log padke ki hetai* / What is the use of education to a woman?

One woman said people are jealous of her at home and do not like her participating in the outdoor activities. They like her to sit at home and do the household chores. But she said, she challenges them if they show their discontentment:

> *What bothers you when I am doing equally well at home and outside? I do my business after doing all the household chores. I have not left my share of work upon your head. (KC)*

Actually, the family members have not liked her involvement in the income generation activities. They felt threatened that it could make her independent and split the joint-extended family. She said she was not getting the money she needed for bringing up her children and if they will not pay for their education, she will ask for her share (of the family property). If they would not give her the share, she will file a case in the court.

Another woman related that she did not get the equal share in her property when they were separated.[19] Now she has filed a case in the court and is paying some amount of her earning for that purpose.

When I was in the field I happened to observe one situation where one group of the literacy participants had formed their group together for their income generation program after they had completed the literacy course. They were not able to work in the group because one of the women did not agree to remain as a treasurer; she wanted to become the secretary of the group. It became clear in the argument that a low caste woman was made

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[19] This is the case regarding parental property which should be distributed equally among brothers when they separate. In this case two of the brothers were separated after their parent's death. Their elder brother was separated when both the parents were alive and had got his share. Now her claim is that the parents did not distribute the property in equal share among those two brothers and she is fighting the case in court.

the secretary and this woman felt inferior working under her. People tried to convince her that the position did not have any hierarchy, rather was formed only to make the group work and the post of the treasurer was more important than that of a secretary for an income generation program, but she was not convinced. It was discovered later that she had been told by her husband to take the position of a secretary rather a treasurer.

There were representatives from Save, club members and all 11 women from the group. They all tried to convince her to accept the treasurer position and let the arrangements be as they were, except one of her friends in the group. Those two were speaking in such a high pitched voice that no one would dare to keep them quiet. When the facilitator tried to convince them they told him, "Who are you to teach us? Why don't you keep quiet and do what we want?" The program organizer from the Save told them if they did not settle it among themselves it was impossible for them to work in a group. Either they have to leave the group or do what the group wants. The two insisted that the program officer should agree with them and accept the positions according to their desire. But as the officer said Save would not interfere in their business and they would have to settle it by themselves and do what the majority of the group wanted; they were really upset. So it was decided to vote in favour or against the previous decision. Except for those two, all voted in favour of the previous decision and still they would not agree. It was suggested to them that they should either leave the group or agree with it, but they would not do either. The meeting was dismissed to let them think and decide. They would not leave the group, as they had already put money in the group fund and they were getting seed money from Save to start a business so they would feel ashamed to agree to their defeat. Later on they compromised and decided to remain in the group and do the program.

This instance gave me an opportunity to believe that perhaps the literacy program has helped strengthen women so they can fight for their desired cause, although it would not suggest 'critical thinking' in the sense of understanding her own society. In this case, social status was the factor guiding her to attain that post, but her courage to counteract the decision of the majority was significant. On the other hand, the women who supported the lower caste woman who was made secretary clearly showed an ability to challenge the caste system and old patterns of behaving which contribute to some women's lack of confidence.

The experience of these women may show that literacy had developed in them a sense of independence, and at least the power to think about themselves which they would not have given much importance to previously. According to them they used to be helpless without the knowledge of the three Rs and they did not give much care about what was

happening around them. But with their participation in the literacy class they were found to be more concerned and curious about the world around them. These areas were mainly focused on their life circumstances which was their own lived reality. The poems and the dialogues of women suggest these realities. Yet these areas are not touched in the formal curriculum of the class. As mentioned in chapter 4 the focus of the program is mainly on the areas of making women functionally literate and making them economically independent and hence raising their standard of living rather than making them critically aware in the sense of the critical thinkers.

An overview of the women's experience shows that the socio-cultural context and the gender relations has a direct impact on their lives. They have been suppressed by these situations for a long time and want to overcome them. But these issues are never discussed in the class, rather they are taught how to prepare *jeevan jal* and take care of their babies, make a healthy environment, generate more income etc., as they are taught to be better mothers and good house wives.

Although they mentioned these things, they were not found talking about the development issues or discussing why these were happening in society; because they were not aware of these situations. This limits the boundary of women to the household again and suggests that women still do not have a concern for the development issues which have a direct impact upon them. They were taking part in the development activities such as planting trees and cleaning village as part of their literacy activities, but politics whether at the local or national level was not an area of concern for women. This has been illustrated in 'women's activities after the literacy program.'

Literacy helps to build self confidence

Women observed that before going to the literacy class they remained in a veil and were hesitant to talk with people but with the awareness they got from the literacy program they have been helped to fight their fears.

> *When the* sirs *(program officers from Save especially male) came we hid ourselves and somebody had to talk on our behalf. We were so* jungalee *we laugh to ourselves when we think about that now. (All)*

> *When I had to go to hatia*[20] *at first I always went with somebody, or asked somebody to do things for me. But now as I can read, I can ask people about the thing I want, I have no problem going alone. Now I can go to* hatia *by myself and do the shopping. I also have started buying and selling*

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[20] A market place

business. I buy rice and make chiura, *buy wheat and make flour and sell them in the market. My husband did most of the marketing business before but now we do it together. When he has other things to do, then I do it by myself. (SC)*

I go to the bank and deposit the money by myself. I had no idea of keeping money in a bank and all the money was spent in the household. Now I try to save as much money as I can and deposit it. I had no idea of a bank and its importance, and the interest etc. But now, I can do what I desire, and get the money when I need it. When I keep the money at home, it is spent just like that. (KC, SD, SK)

At first I could not go anywhere other than my own neighbourhood but now I can catch a bus and go where ever I like to. Now I can read the bus number and see the plate and can catch the bus that I needed. No one can cheat me, and I do not fear to be lost. (GD)

Women said that the program was helpful to build confidence in them in many respects especially in opening the doors to the outer world. The men-folk around also commented that they have begun to quite often discuss matters with them in which they would have ignored them before. The program organizers of the Save the Children also remarked that at the beginning it was difficult for them to bring the women into the program, but now they come by themselves to discuss their problems. Now they decide their programs by themselves and the Save people only supervise them.

In my field stay, on one occasion women called me,[21] and began to interview me to know about myself. There was a little crowd of women and children. One of the women began to ask me what I was doing and my purpose for coming into their village and what I would do with the information I collected from them. I told them all about my research and its purpose.

When they knew that I was studying in Canada, they began to ask several questions. Was it somewhere in America? Was it similar to America? How do people live there, what do they eat, how do they behave with the others, etc. etc. One of them said "one American guy had come in our village and he did not know how to eat rice. He ate from the middle of the plate, and he did not put rice,[22] vegetables and *dal*[23] together like us

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[21] I never realized that women would be curious to know about me. I was surprised to see a huge crowd of women and children gathered, waiting for my arrival. I was really scared at first as to what was going to happen. There were women from other literacy classes also who actually wanted to know why I had chosen this particular group and not theirs. I was pleased to know that they were happy at my presence in the village, but concerned that they had a high expectation of something from me, and it was important that I made clear my purpose for being there.

[22] Rice is a staple food in Nepal and people eat rice two times a day in the morning or afternoon and in the

while he ate. What do you eat there? Can you get rice there?" Another woman asked what dress I would wear in Canada, a sari or a pant like the Americans.[24] When I said I needed to wear slacks as it is cold there, they began to ask me to show them what I looked like in slacks. Then they asked about the women in Canada. When I told them all about their education, work, independence, culture, behaviour, food, living style and so on they looked at each other and exclaimed wow! can we imagine being like that?

I was really amazed by their interview. I had been feeling very stressed in interviewing women about their private lives but they themselves made my job easier by interviewing me. Some of them wanted to have their photographs in my thesis. They showed one book about literacy activities in Gorkha district and the participants' photo in it, with their view about the program, and they asked if I also could put in their photographs like that. When I told I did not think I was allowed to do so they felt very sad. It was really a pleasure for me being with the women in the village.

The income generation program has helped them in building even more confidence. Women feel proud of having their own personal savings which they said has helped them do things they wished to do without anybody's consent. They explained this in the following way:

> *Apne hath mein chhai ta dusra se mage nai padte. Apne man kar sakaichhi na. Dusra se magbe ta thodi na detai. Katek ber khusamad karu ta detai. Toho kaha sunaike./* If you have money in your own hand you will not have to ask others. You can spend as you wish. If you ask others, would they give you as much as you want? Even if they give it to you, they tell you so many things. (SK)
>
> *I want to buy some land in my name so that I can afford my children's education. I want to earn more money from the income generation activities. (KC)*
>
> *I want to develop my shop so that I can earn to support my family. I needed to learn some more accounting so that I can handle it properly. (SD)*

While for most of the women the income generation program had helped them to think and work independently, it had not helped some that much. They still needed their

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evening. These women were surprised when somebody did not know how to eat rice and dal, as s/he would eat.

[23] lentils

[24] The term American is very popular in Nepal. In the countryside people regard every white person as American no matter what their origin.

men's help in this regard. Women's reluctance, due to household chores and baby care, were the main reasons for that. Women did their income generating activities in addition to their work on the farm and in the household; while men participated in the women's income generating activities they did not share the work of the household chores except in some unavoidable cases. Some women told of their experiences with their husbands :

> *No, he would never like to work in the kitchen. If I asked for his help he will say:Hamahi sab kaam karbe? Aahan ke kharcha kathila karli, ee sab karaila?/* Should I do all this why had I to marry you? Why did I spend so much money in marriage?*Hamahi tora bhansa karke debai?/* Am I supposed to cook for you? (SK)

> *He thinks the household chores are only a women's job and hates to work in the kitchen, and so do my sons. They would never turn up to work in the kitchen. I get help only from my daughter. She also has to go to school and I have to do all the rest. They only work if we are sick, that too with great fuss. (SK)*

> *When my father-in-law was alive, it was even worse. If for any reason I could not work he used to say: Kam nahi kar sakaichhi ta apne maike jo /* If you cannot work go to your maiti. *And it was very difficult to work with small children. There was no other woman in the household to ask for help. I gave birth to my first child at the age of 16 and had to do everything with the child: and two others were born at intervals of two years. Then I cried a lot. I wanted to die sometimes. No man can understand a woman's problem. (SK)*

> *My husband would never like to work in the kitchen. Sometimes my mother-in-law helps. If both of us are not well we ask help from the neighbourhood. (GC)*

The rest of the women thought that the household chore was never a man's job and they never expected a man to help them in those things. In most of the cases there were other women to help them in the kitchen and they did not require their men's help.

Thus, even though men did not mind sharing the women's private income generating activities they still seemed reluctant to give them an opportunity for further activities by helping them in kitchen. Some of them seemed rather threatened by their wives' outside activities. The husband of one of the women said to me; *"Wahan anusasan ma hunuhunna tapai sikai dinus" ./* She is not disciplined, will you please teach her how to behave?

I felt really threatened by his words. But later he said she was fine and doing well, but sometimes she wants to be clever and does not listen to him. According to the wife the man hardly looked towards the household affairs, and she has to look after them totally. When they were separated from the extended family they received only a small plot of land

and she was given a buffalo in dowry from her *maiti*. By selling the milk she was able to develop a small shop in the village, and work there. Her husband did not do anything to raise the income of the family, rather he gossiped about her and scolded her often. He only worked on the farm and the rest of the time he spent chatting with other men in the village.

Some women still lack self confidence

Women from the younger group, who still were under the domination of their family heads, mostly the husband and the mother-in-law, were found more likely to fall behind in the activities than their other counterparts who were older and household heads. Most of the women in the literacy class were heads of a household; that is they were the most senior woman in the household without a mother-in-law or father-in-law or older brother-in-law with authority over them in household matters. Consequently, they were able to participate in the program without interference from their family members. However men, in particular their husbands who would be the senior man in the family, play the dominant role in the household decisions in their families too; they consented to their wives accepting the opportunity to take part in their literacy activities given that they complete their household duties before going to the literacy class. This expectation was held of all the women, and it meant some of the women with children had difficulties to take part fully in the program. The first priority for these women was to complete their family duty, household chores and take care of their children; then only could they do other things. Because of this reason two of the daughters-in-law who belonged to an extended family had left the program at the basic literacy level. While the older women managed to participate and later do the income generation activity with the help of their children, or by themselves when their children went to school, the younger women hardly found any spare time to be involved in the income generating and other activities. Because of this, the family head, either the husband or the mother-in-law, were taking part on their behalf in such matters. Although they felt eased from the responsibility of these activities with their family members' participation in it, they themselves were not benefiting from the program as much as their counterparts. Two of the women in my case study were in this situation. They said:

> *I could not go to the group work as I had a small baby and the household chores to do. My mother-in-law took part in my place. I could look after the baby and work side by side in the household. My mother-in-law would not allow me to leave the baby and go for work, and she prefers to work outside than in the kitchen. It is absolutely my job. Although I would like to participate in the program with my friends I could not do so. (GD)*

> *I could not get time from my own household chores and in addition I had to look after the baby, my husband does not like to do these jobs. He would*

rather take part in the group work on my behalf. I would have joined the group activities had my husband shared my household work. Men prefer to work outside than inside the kitchen, and he can work more than me anyway. (CC)

According to them it was difficult for them to decide on their own to take part in these activities. Although the family members encouraged them to take part in the literacy and income generating activities and helped them in their group work, the women themselves were hesitant to ask for their help inside the household. In their view the household job was absolutely their job and it was impolite to ask the help of their elders.

These two women had not even taken the *khutruke* because they could not put money in it as they could not save it; as the head of their households were involved in the program they would naturally hold the cash in their hand. Although these women could not save money in their personal account they were depositing the money in their group account which was compulsory for the survival of the group.

On the other hand, the young unmarried girls who had taken part in the literacy program were all married at the age of 13, 14, and 15 just after the literacy class. In their opinion they had learned how to read and write and were happy about that. But their literacy learning had made no difference in getting a good husband or getting a good job. Most of them were married to an illiterate person and so had to depend on wage earning. They were also mostly married to families in India and had no land to work. They regarded the literacy as helpful to them, in enabling them to write their name, read the bus number, read the posters, do the shopping etc. They added: "we knew nothing about health and sanitation, and how to prepare *jeevan Jal* and we can use this knowledge when we need it." However, in general they were not sure what they were going to do with their literacy knowledge in the future. Married into an extended family with much work to do, they would hardly have time to retain or revive their literacy knowledge. Even if they had the time, they did not show an interest in continuing their education. For them a woman's job is confined to the household and they would not be allowed to do any more besides that in their new homes.

Thematic presentation of data; after the literacy class

Women's activities after the literacy program

Most of the women were found to engage themselves in both the income generation work and household chores equally. There was no change in the previous daily activities after their participation in the literacy program but now, in addition, they had to do their

income generation program. They were thus doubly burdened, and on top of that the women with little babies still had to look after them. Yet they were happy to do all this work without complaint because they were getting some benefits from it. All these burdens, household chores, looking after the babies and animals etc. were regarded as their own jobs by the women; as they said:

> *I have to do all my household chores and the income generation activity. There is no one to share hands in these works. I cannot say I am tired, because I am a mother and a wife and I am supposed to do all these works without any complaint. Only the daughter helps a bit in the kitchen. She also has to go to school. How much can she do for me? This is what a woman has to do. There is no one to share our works and our problems. We have to look after all the family affairs.*
>
> *Besides, I also have to do the group work and other social activities such as cleaning of the village, going to the procession etc. I also have to go to the bank sometimes to deposit the money and have to go to attend meetings when the Save's office calls. (SK)*
>
> *I mostly work in the kitchen. I prepare the morning* Jalkhai, *after that I do some other household chores. We have a big family, it takes about 5 hours to prepare Jalkhai for all; then I take rest for some time. I have to knead 5kg. flour, roll and bake it in the* chulha *(*stove*) daily. I also go to the field sometimes. The other times I work for my children and other things. I go to hatia sometimes to buy things (*grocery*) and sell food grains for our IG program.*
>
> *I am doing goat raising and marketing of food grains. I also have to go for the group works and other social activities organized by the group besides all my works.*
>
> *I am doing goat raising as my personal business, and the marketing business I do with my other Jethanis* (sister-in-laws). *Three of us who had taken part in the literacy program are doing this business together. I have to go to the bank to deposit money in the group fund. I also need to attend meetings when the Save's office calls for it. (KC)*
>
> *I have to do the household chores myself. Sometimes my daughter helps in the kitchen but she also goes to school and I have to do all those things alone. Apart from this, I have to look after the animals also. I do food processing and sell them in the market. I also go for wage earning because I do not have much land. I also buy and sell food grains. My husband helps me in marketing. Besides, I also have to work in the group and other group activities. I get so tired at the end of the day, yet I have to do all for the survival of my family. (SC)*
>
> *I have to do all the household work myself. I have to look after the animals also. I also have got my goat and ox to look after. My daughters go to school and cannot give time to help me. They say they have to study. My husband is out most of the time due to his own personal work. I am left alone to do all these jobs. My health is not good so I cannot do as much as my other friends, still I am participating in all the group works with them. I like to work in the group. (DS)*

Saudamini has a different story than the others because she is now relaxed from the household burdens as she has a daughter-in-law to do all these things. She seems more active and enthusiastic than others in many respects. She says:

> *Now most of my household chores are taken care of by my daughter-in-law and I have to do only a little inside the home. I am involved in most of the group work, in personal business and other social activities such as: cleaning of the village, procession etc. I also have plans to do tree plantation and do some more income generation program in the group. I went in processions - in women's day, the queen's birthday, human rights day etc. I really enjoyed taking part in such programs. The* sirs *come from the Save's office to organize such programs and tell us how to do it. We go in procession in such programs throughout the village area.*
>
> *I help women in the village in different matters, I feel satisfaction in doing these things. At present I am mostly engaged in my personal business, and keeping the shop. Besides, I take part in all the group activities and mobilize the women for group work. I also go to attend meetings when the office of the Save calls for it. (SD)*

Women with small babies and still in the daughter-in-law position were having a hard time trying to do all these things. Their household chores and baby care were keeping them engaged most of the time. Godavari could hardly take part in the group programs due to this reason although she is very much interested in taking part in all the activities with her friends.

Although women were found to be very active and enthusiastic to do more activities and had already done quite a lot on their behalf, such capabilities seemed to have had little effect on gaining a higher status in the family. Most of the family cash was still kept by men and women were just providing their labour to the family and supporting the family income. Most of their income still went to the family affairs. The experience of most of the women revealed this fact. In the voice of women:

> *Both my husband and myself do the marketing business. Previously we used to live on wage earning and farm work. Now both of us are doing the business as a part of my income generation activity and household income. After I pay back the loan and put the money in the khutruke the rest is spent on the family affairs. Both of us deal in the family affairs but, he usually keeps the rest of the money which we earn as profit. I also do keep a bit whenever necessary. (SC)*
>
> *I have not been able to save any money from my business as I am investing it in my business. I have to save at least Rs.12 for the group fund which I have kept apart. My husband keeps the total family money and the money he has earned. I don't even know how much he earns. I ask him for money if I require it to spend on the family affairs. (DS)*

> *I have not done much work to earn more. I have little time from my household chores and baby. I have not been able to save any money. My husband mostly deals with cash at home. I even did not take the khutruke because I did not see the use of it. My income generation work are mostly taken care of by my husband and mother-in-law. (GD)*

All these women said or implied that they did not care much who keeps the money as they were getting the money whenever they needed it. It was not the same case with Saudamini, Sakalani and Kamala who feel that they need to keep the cash by themselves. Although they provide much labour in the family they keep their earning by themselves. These three have opened their own accounts in the bank and keep their income in it. But in the family they still have the subordinate position except for Sakalani who says, in her case, both the husband and wife share in the family affairs equally. Even so she says most of the important decisions are made by him.

Kamala who belongs to an extended family has little to say in the family affairs. She is all alone in her personal business and knows little about the family property and other affairs. She is hardly involved in the family affairs as the men mostly deal with these matters. Being a widow and the youngest daughter-in-law her boundary is still limited to the four walls of household. She describes the role of the male members in her family as follows:

> *The elder* Jethaju *is the chairman of the Village Development Committee (VDC). The second brother-in-law is manager of the household and keeps accounts. We have a rice, flour and oil mill. The elder brother-in-law has only one son. He could not study much, he takes care of the mill. These two brothers-in-law keep the total household accounts. The third* Jethaju *looks after farm and the fourth one is an* amin *(*land surveyor*), and is working at Mugu (*a district in the mid-western mountains*). My husband was the youngest son. (KC)*

As known from the people in the village Kamala's husband was a good man and first engineer of the village. He had done quite a lot of work in the village when he was alive. The son of the second brother-in-law is a teacher at Hetaunda (a place in the central hill region) and his wife is also a primary school teacher in the village. The son's wife has two small children (both daughters) and mostly looks after them besides her school work and does cleaning of the household.

> *All four brothers look after the family affairs in need but those who are at home will mostly take care of it. My husband was an engineer. He used to send all of his money when he was in service and the brothers could buy the land which is now our joint property. He didn't keep anything for us. Now, I have to do everything for my children. (KC)*

In an extended family where the women possesses only the subordinate role they were found only contributing their labour rather than gaining the benefit from it. For women like Kamala this program had given an opportunity to think about themselves by making them aware of their situation. Kamala explains the situation in her family in the following way:

> *I have bought 7 katthas of land by selling my ornaments. I work for them all the time even then my family members are not pleased at my work. They think that I should stay home and work all the time and stop working for my individual benefit. But I tell them that I do all the household work and do my personal work so why should they bother about it. Three of us, who have taken part in the program - the third, fourth, and the fifth daughters-in-law have the same thinking and the two elder daughters-in-law are not happy with us. They feel jealous of us. But we don't care, we are doing thing in our own ways. Apart from the women's group, we three work in our own group buying and selling food grains or making chiura and selling it in market. This money we keep for our personal expenditure. They do not give enough money to buy educational materials or other things for my kids, so I need to save money for that purpose. Everybody has bought some land on their own. They will give me only 2-3 bighas of land if I separated but it won't happen. They will never separate because the elder two have all their money in their display. So I see it would be difficult to educate my children as much as I could; if it happens though, if we separate, I will fight and ask for my share.*

Had Kamala's husband been alive things would have been different. She would have been the most benefited person in the family perhaps, but the case is the reverse now. A widow has the lowest position in the family. Family politics was found to play the major role in this context.

Although women were found very much interested in increasing their income and were actively engaged in their income generation program they were rarely found continuing their study at home. They were seldom seen reading any kind of books during my stay in the field. They did not even care much to listen to the radio. However the men listened to the daily news and talked about politics while the women were busy inside the kitchen or with other household work most of the time. Listening to the radio was remote from their daily routine, and they would not be able to get hold of it when the men were around in any case. Sometimes the men gathered together to listen to the important news, especially in the evening time after they came back from their work. I was curious to know about this and asked a man why women were not found listening to the news or other programs for women, was this because of their language problem? Then he said, "there is a program in Maithili also if they want to listen, but they are not interested, only sometimes do they listen to it."

During my field work it was election time and the men mostly talked about politics and were concerned about who was contesting the election. I heard from them that a woman candidate was contesting the election from Siraha district but women in the village did not show any interest in that. Commenting on this point one young man said "what does a woman have to do with the politics, she is good in the kitchen. Who will take care of it if they begin to be involved in politics." A few women who were around when he was speaking only smiled and did not say anything.

The women's field of responsibility was still found to be primarily limited to the household and kitchen and they are expected to be perfect in these areas. Acquiring literacy skills, and being economically independent did not bring change in the thinking of people about them. Even though their activities had increased and they themselves were happy in what they were doing it did not bring any difference in their social status.

Women's group as a source of power

The other way of building self confidence among women was the formation of the women's group. Many women who lack their voices in private get courage from their friends and thus become equal partners in the development activities. When they are in a group, they have the group's liabilities and have to work for the group benefit and through this, they begin to get courage in the long run through their activities. Most of the women showed their willingness to work in the group and take part in different activities organized by the group and most related that they had benefited in various way through their group activity. They said:

> *I don't get much time because I am not that well and cannot work hard. So group work has helped me a lot. It also has given me spirit. We have saved a lot of money and we can take a loan out of that and invest. (DS)*

> *We did onion and potato cultivation in the group and made good money out of it. Now we want to do some vegetables and fisheries in the group. We have discussed among us about it and have approached the VDC chief for that. We also are planning to do tree plantation on both the sides of road but Save did not agree because the cattle will not let them grow. We plan to do it somewhere else. We work in a group and so it gives us courage and also spirit. We all have the same voice. Our group has good cooperation. (SC)*

> *I was confined to the kitchen and in my own work. But after we joined the class we formed a group. Now we are in a group, and all of us have the same voice. If one proposes to do something we all agree in it. We work together and put the money in our group balance from where we take loans and do our personal business. All of us have enjoyed the group work. It gives us courage and spirit. (SK)*

We were the first group to start the (literacy) class. We are one. What we do, we do for each other. We are a very good group. In the group we have done onion and potato farming. We also sold tea and snacks on the occasion of our literacy completion. On some other occasions also we did the same thing to raise money in our group fund. We have also participated in various social activities such as cleaning the village, planting the trees etc. We also went in procession in various occasions, it gives courage. I get moral support and courage from the group. (KC)

We have developed the habit of working in the group. Now we feel we are one. We have the same feeling and work in harmony with each other. We help each other in group work also. You know all of them don't have the same condition some have small babies and cannot come, so in that case one of the family members comes to help. We teach about family planning, preparing jeewan jal, how to take care of the babies, etc. to other village women also. After seeing us many women have joined the literacy program. Now there are 5 or 6 other groups in our area who are participating in the program. We are the first group and the best, we have a good solidarity.

We also have plans to do tree plantation and do some more income generation program in the group. We also took part in various occasions and went in processions such as on - women's day, the queen's birthday, human rights day etc. throughout the village area. (SD)

The group activity also helped women to understand each other's problems and work in harmony with each other. They were getting help among each other; for example, in the income generating program the women rented land from among their partners and did kitchen gardening, which helped the women who did not have enough land. They also had occasional tea and snacks shops during certain festivals and earned money for the group. This group activity has been a source of great enthusiasm for the women to work.

The women's group was also found to be a platform to fight social evils such as caste hierarchy. Women from different caste groups were working together without any inhibition of caste hierarchy. Even though they were maintaining the caste system in their day-to-day life, it was not apparent in their working together. In one of the groups mentioned earlier, this did become an issue when a woman did not like to work as a treasurer under a low caste woman who was elected as secretary, but the majority of women refuted her by saying that either she should leave the group or agree with the decision made earlier. She had to surrender at last because she did not want to lose the money that had been deposited for group work.

Women's groups have now brought competition among the women At first it was difficult to organize a single literacy program in the community, now there are three or four such groups and quite a number of women were interested in joining the program. *Janasebi Mahila Samuha* (Janasebi women's group) that I observed, was the first women's

group to start the program in that VDC and has been continuing the program successfully. This has been an example of solidarity and group work among women.

The group was not a new concept for the village women. The Choudhari women mostly went together in the field work and helped each other in need whereas the Saha women did not go out for the field work and were mostly confined to their household. The group activity had been able to bring the Saha women also into farm work which has been a great achievement of this program.

Some of the religious functions were also done in a group by women. One such festival is *Jitia* which falls in the month of October. I had a chance to observe this festival while I was in the village. In this festival which is the main festival for women, as they told me, most of the married women keep fasting. They eat delicious food one day before the fasting; late in the night and the next day they keep fasting without even drinking water which is just like the *Teej* festival among the hill caste Brahmin women. In the evening time all the women who fast gather around the pond and offer worship to the God called Jeet Mahan. It is a male God and this fasting was done for the welfare of the children as the women said. There was a fair on this occasion in the village and a dance party was hired to give a show. Although traditional groups existed in the society they did not function in an organized way and thus were not active. The literacy and income generation program had been able to successfully mobilize this group idea.

Summary

The six women who made up the case studies for this work display some differences in their background and their lives, but major similarities. As they describe their life before the literacy class, and their thoughts on education, it is clear that they see lack of schooling in their childhood as a problem for them, a problem which they begin to address with the literacy class. From the literacy class they not only acquire some literacy in the national language but come to think differently about themselves, claim more and new knowledge, and for the most part they have more confidence. But for most of them the most important outcome has been their ability to engage in income generating activities after the literacy class. Associated with that is the importance of the women's group that they have formed to support them in their post-literacy class work.

What are the implications of these observations, their description of their lives, and the initial questions about women's empowerment? The final chapter turns to reflect on that question.

Chapter 7

A reflection on the study

As explained earlier most of the literacy programs in Nepal are based on the functionalist/developmentalist paradigm and they aim at empowering people especially women through this process. The belief behind this is that the ability to read and write as well as economic enhancement will empower women who lack education and access to property and also bring women into the main stream of development. Literacy and income generation programs are used as vehicles for change and development. On this ground my study aimed to see how and whether such a literacy program worked to empower women, and if so, in what respect? How do women feel about themselves after becoming literate and in what ways do women perceive literacy as an empowering process; that is, what does empowerment mean to them in the context of literacy?

With this purpose in mind, I talked with six literacy 'graduates' in the *terai* region where women's social mobility is restricted, and observed them in their community. They had participated in one of the literacy programs conducted by Save the Children USA which has the aim of empowering women through literacy based on the functionalist paradigm. In this regard I was curious to know what meaning women gave to being empowered as a result of their being literate. My other question arose as a result of the study of literature which indicated that an empowering literacy/education should bring change in peoples' social, political, economic and psychological situation.

Based on the case studies of the women who participated in the literacy program an attempt has been made in this chapter to provide a reflection of my study to answer these queries.

Women's meaning of empowerment

My assessment of the women's understanding of empowerment and how literacy related to it was based on their descriptions of change in their lives since they began the literacy program. In these descriptions, women implied different meanings to being empowered through literacy. They described increased self-expressive power through acquisition of the Nepali language, gaining knowledge in different areas of their day to day life, increasing or acquiring the ability to earn, increased mobility, increased self confidence and a positive self image, and the development of the women's group. These points have been illustrated under separate headings.

Self expressive power through acquisition of Nepali language

Language had been a major problem for women who could hardly express themselves in Nepali which is the National language. Their lack of knowledge about the mainstream language had handicapped them in dealing with people from other communities and resulted in them feeling confined to their own community and household. Although they had a little knowledge and understanding of the language it was difficult to communicate with other people. Their increased competence in the Nepali language had opened the door to different areas by making them more able to express themselves than before.

Their knowledge of reading and writing made them able to write their signature in the bank and for other official matters. Now they could read the bus number and the place the bus is going, so they did not need to ask other people about that. Their reading ability also helped them to read the label on goods in shops, reading the posters and sign boards etc. These were skills women identified as being of great help.

Women clearly regarded the increase in their power of expression as empowering. It increased their capacity or ability to accomplish things they wished to accomplish, and it enabled them to broaden the base of people with whom they could talk and learn from. Learning the language which is the only official language in the country and the language spoken by a majority of the people, helped them to deal with people in different offices and made it easy for them to deal, for a variety of purposes, with other people who did not understand their language. They had previously hesitated to talk with other people and mix with them due to the language problem and hence felt confined to their own circle. Now they talk with people from outside and discuss their problems with them without hesitation. They thought of the people who knew more Nepali than themselves as also more knowledgeable than themselves and expressed a desire to learn more Nepali language so that they could do even better.

As their acquisition of Nepali had many day to day 'functional' advantages, it is understandable that this would make them feel more confident and self-assured, more able to deal with their environment. However, this was not literacy in any language or even their own language, this was specifically literacy and developing conversational competence in the national language. It would require a much different kind of study to determine how literacy in community or local languages might impact on women. And it would seem that along with literacy in Nepali came the attitude that people who spoke Nepali had more

knowledge than they had, a suggestion of a disvaluing of the knowledge carried in their own language.

Another great achievement from the literacy class for some of them was gaining the ability to express themselves in writing. One of the women in the case study was able to compose poems in the Maithili language which attacked the situation of illiterate women and their need for education. She had written poems on different occasions and won prizes which was encouraging as well as empowering for her. She was very pleased to recite her poems to me, and to show her prizes, which she had kept very carefully. Literacy in this case seems to have surfaced the latent potentials in women giving them a platform and hence empowering them. This form of 'empowerment' is in sharp contrast to the 'functional' form described above in relation to the Nepali language, and perhaps closer to what many of the critical educators see as empowerment.

To be more knowledgeable

Women regarded the literacy program as one providing more knowledge and empowering them. Not only did they speak of the skill areas of reading and writing and being able to do basic arithmetic as knowledge, they spoke of knowledge about health and sanitation, and nutrition and child care.

Reading and writing has been addressed above, especially as a 'functional' or 'useful' activity; the knowledge acquired of mathematics was similar in nature. It would add to their ability to keep accounts in their businesses. They were eager to learn more mathematics so that they did not require any assistance in doing difficult calculations in their daily activities, especially as they were engaged in the income generating program. According to them, the numeracy lessons given in the literacy class were not enough to do all these things as they provided only simple counting. However they put much emphasis on learning more mathematics, to make themselves more strong and confident in calculating their cash. Again, the ability to gain control over their environment which is part of empowerment is attached to a useful competence, and their concern was that they had only a 'taste' of this skill/knowledge area whereas they needed much more.

Another area of high importance which was mentioned was gaining knowledge in the area of hygiene and sanitation. This knowledge was very important for them as they had little knowledge about it before they joined the program and were not much aware of the causes of communicable diseases such as diarrhea, cholera etc. Now they have realized that many communicable diseases are a result of pollution and also due to negligence and

ignorance. This knowledge as they said was very essential for them to be aware of the diseases and get necessary treatment. Their knowledge to prepare *jeevan jal,* and child care was also mentioned to be of great help. Only by gaining knowledge the women feel themselves better than other women in their community. More than gaining knowledge per se, was the feeling of being knowledgeable in these areas which was expressed as a source of empowerment by most of the women.

This area of knowledge is described by the women in a way which implies empowerment, greater confidence in their lives. But there is a troubling question... "being knowledgeable in these areas" is expressed as a source of empowerment yet there is little evidence that this knowledge was applied in their daily lives. Unlike the reading and the mathematics, which they clearly 'used' in their environment, they seemed not to use this knowledge. It suggests that perhaps they are also developing through the literacy program and elsewhere the idea of knowledge as related to status, 'being knowledgeable' as something separate from 'providing healthy environments' for themselves and their families.

Economic independence

Women also regarded their ability to earn and be independent as a source of empowerment. In their view they were not dealing directly with cash before and had little decision making power. Now as they know different techniques to earn money and are given an opportunity to do their activities independently they feel more empowered. The feeling that they own something of their own has given them confidence. Women who were regarded as incompetent and unable to earn a living by themselves had proved to be self dependent by bringing cash into the home. Their income generating activities had made them more confident and enthusiastic. Except for one case, most of the women said that their family members have appreciated their work and have supported them in those activities which was highly empowering for them. This encouragement from their family members has given them more strength to do even more. The one person who did not have this experience of family support, was a widow and living in an extended family. She had a bit of a difficult time gaining moral support from her family, although she was the one getting the most benefit from her income generating activity and getting a chance to earn and work outside the home. She was planning to buy land or make money for the future of her children.

It was implied by the situation and the expression of women that their ability to earn and making a personal financial gain was particularly empowering for them. Most of them

said now they will not have to rely on their husbands or family for money. It was their experience that they had to face some uncomfortable situations in their homes while asking for money which made them weak and dependent. Although women contributed a lot in the family economy, and also held a share in the family property, they were not supposed to ask for money for their personal use. This situation often times made women weak and vulnerable and was disempowering to them. Now they feel more confident and powerful in this respect than before.

Some of them have been able to open an account in the bank which has made them more enthusiastic and powerful. Keeping money in the bank was found to be a great achievement for women who have lacked access to their family property or financial affairs of the family. The women who had managed to open an account in the bank were more confident and contented in their work than the others. The rest of the women were also planning to open their personal accounts in the bank in the coming Nepalese new Year, following the path of these women.

Increased Mobility

Women also regarded their increased mobility as empowering for them. Their confinement to the household had made them limited in their thinking by limiting their contact with other people. Now as they come out from the household for their income generating activities and other social gatherings they feel even more confident than before. As they said, they have been able to contact more people and knew how to deal with different people. According to them their way of thinking has been changed a lot as they said: "We were *jungalee* and did not know how to deal with other people. We hesitated to talk with the strangers; now we want to see more people and talk with them."

Their participation in the literacy had made them more mobile and hence made them confident. They said now they could catch a bus and go to the bank or the head office by themselves. Women who were mostly confined to their household found their mobility an empowering process.

The tour program organized by Save the Children USA had given a few women an opportunity to gain experience from others. They said that it had been very beneficial to know about other people, providing them a chance to compare themselves with the other people and hence had helped to bring change in their thinking. According to them, their experience in the tour program made them feel far behind in comparison to their counterparts in another village and encouraged them to do more. These women appreciated

the tour program very much and expressed the opinion that it provided them with more insight and knowledge than the literacy class.

Increased confidence: a positive self image

Women said that literacy had brought a positive self image in them which was a new experience. In their opinion they used to feel unable to do so many things just by being a woman. They used to think that the household was the only place for them and coming out of it was never a thought on their minds. They believed this was the only area where they could expect appreciation for their work. It seemed incredible to them that they could have done so much within a short period of time. Now as they said even the men are surprised by their work and all the villagers appreciate it.

Social prejudices against women and the male supremacy were the main factors developing a negative self image within them. Women themselves perpetuated the prejudices due to age old tradition and lack of knowledge. Their participation in the literacy program brought some insight into their own situation and made them think differently but it was still difficult for them to go against traditions which had been a practice and habit all their lives. The literacy, and their involvement in the income generation program, was able to build confidence in them and it was a milestone to change already established behaviour and attitudes, but all did not change around them.

Now the women have been able to analyze the drawbacks which are in themselves and hope to overcome those by their involvement in various social and other activities. Some of them also related that literacy provided them with increasing ability to fight for justice. They hold a strong view about being able to exercise their rights at the time of need at least with their men's help. Their participation in a literacy program that provided lessons on the legal rights of women had given them an opportunity to know about their rights.

Women's Group as empowering:

Most of the women said that they felt more powerful and confident just being in the group. According to them it would have been difficult for them to continue their activities if they were not in a group. The group, as the women related, provided them with moral and psychological support giving them strength to do their work. Individual weakness in their experience could be overcome while working in the group. Although women in the village had their own group and joined together at times of need its focus was limited to their household affairs. But now they have become an organized force and can act as a

change agent in the village. Women in this respect feel themselves more powerful than before.

Their group work according to them, had made them economically strong. Due to their group work the women could make more money from which they could borrow loans and do their individual business and hence generate more income. The group effort in this sense was regarded as a great source of empowerment by women.

As a group women were involved in various community development activities and got appreciation in the village which provided them with inspiration to do more. Taking part in various processions and programs made them feel even better in the society. Being the first group of this kind the women were found to have experienced new things and were glad about that. This group called "*Janasevi Mahila Samuha*" had developed a reputation for its work and had received appreciation from others in the village.

The women observed that their participation in the literacy program had made them develop some innovative ideas to do their business in the group and make more money. In their view they could make more money by working in the group than working individually. Women who were not capable enough to do all these things also benefited from the group activity. They had an opportunity to learn more from their counterparts and increase their ability at the same time. The women's success in the group program had encouraged them to develop more programs as a group.

According to them, the group was also acting as a forum to provide them comfort by giving them a chance to share their feelings. They were getting psychological satisfaction being involved in the group and could be a help for each other at the time of their need. By sharing support in all the spheres - social, economic and psychological, they felt more empowered as women who share similar problems.

It was revealed from this study that the meaning of empowerment for women was a power of self expression with the acquisition of mainstream language, to be knowledgeable in different areas of their concern that they usually had to face in their daily life situation, to have the ability to earn a living to support themselves and their family, to be able to be mobile and be active in their work so they could gain success, and to be more confident in themselves by developing a positive self image. In addition to this the women also regarded their family support, and the experience of group as empowering aspects for them.

Has literacy been a source of empowerment?

Through looking at their experience as we have just done, we would be inclined to answer yes to this question, but going beyond their self-descriptions by thinking of empowerment in the way it was defined at the beginning of this text may open up other avenues for exploration and understanding. Thus the question becomes, was it able to bring change:

- in relation to their social and political situations?
- in relation to their economic situations?
- in relation to their psychological situations?

The outcome of the field study revealed the following answers to these questions.

Bring change in relation to their social and political situations

Women seemed to continue their traditional roles despite being literate. Their participation in the literacy program had not made them able to fight against the household drudgery and bring change in their traditional roles. However, they were now able to identify that was not merely their fate but due partly to prohibition from various knowledge sources and that made them think differently about their situation. All of them blamed their parents for keeping them away from educational opportunity. Marriage at a very young age and social prejudices against women were some other aspects that women regarded as barriers in their situation.

But overall, this study suggests that the social situation of women has not changed much with their participation in the literacy program. The status of women report (Acharya and Bennett, 1981) revealed that the status of women among the Maithili and Tharu community was one of the lowest of the eight communities they studied where most of the decisions regarding household, farm and cash are made by men. Contrary to this, in other communities these decisions were made by both men and women. The *purdah* system, men's domination, and socio-cultural prejudices against women still are barriers in the personal development of women. That is why most of the women who participated in the literacy class were somehow older and the head of household activities, or the most senior woman in the household, and so they already had some decision making power. Most of the young women who were newly married and who were mothers were not able to join the program because they were not the decision makers in the family and so were deprived of the opportunity. One repercussion was that small children were not taken good care of

despite much emphasis on health care in the literacy program. The grandmother's participation in the literacy program did not have much impact on the care of the grandchildren, for such care was not their responsibility.

The assumption of the developmentalists that basic functional literacy and economic enhancement will take care of everything for the development of individuals, did not seem to work well in regards to the women of this area. The trickle down model of the developmentalists did not show any positive impact on this matter. As the program organizers said it was still difficult to bring the *buharis* in the program not only due to time constraints but also due to social restrictions and domination. The young women who are the potential force of development are restricted at their natal place by the parents, are married at the very young age and restricted by the role of the young daughter-in-law in their household of marriage. They were further neglected by the program organizers from sharing the benefits in the development process.

This situation questions even the fundamentals of development policies that advocate that women must be literate in terms of their crucial role in society as producers and reproducers: they are "mainly responsible for the care and well-being of their families; they play an important role as educators of future generations" (Ballara, 1991, p.15). The claim that literacy is a right to which everyone should have access does not seem to apply in this case where it is precisely the care-givers who are least able to take advantage of the literacy program.

The gender and caste hierarchy in the community also prevailed despite the literacy work, contributing to a low self image among the women in general and the low caste women in particular. A literacy that aimed at providing the reproductive role of women did not seem to change the attitude of men towards women and produce a respect for their work. Because this has been the characteristic feature of the *Maithili community* as Acharya (1981) reveals:

> The sexual stratification is one of the most inequitable features of the Maithili socio-economic structure where fathers would be always higher than mothers, sons higher than daughters, brothers higher than sisters and husbands higher than wives (p.210)

So people are distinctly seen as superior and inferior both by gender and caste. Although women of diverse backgrounds work in the group, they still maintain caste divisions in their private lives which creates low self-esteem among the lower caste women. Working continuously in the group could help to solve the problem of caste in the

long run when working in the group becomes compulsory as was found in one of the cases; but the issue of gender does not seem to have been addressed by that group process and seems unlikely to change for a long time.

Women in extended families, where the household chores are shared by other women, have the privilege of having some spare time for outside work. However, jealousy still persists between women who got a chance to be in the program and those who did not. This discontentment among family members has the possibility of splitting the extended family, a family structure which has made them economically and socially better off in the society even though the cleaver ones still seem able to exploit others within the family.

The importance of a son was still emphasized in the community and by the women, regardless of the fact that women provide more service to the household chores and the economy. Although one woman in my case study who had 3 daughters and no sons had already had the family planning operation, it was due to health reasons rather than following small family norms. On the other hand, one woman in the women's group still was conceiving in the hope of a son after having 3 daughters.

Women are still married at an early age. Most of the girls who participated in the class were already married. They were married at the ages of 14, 15 and 16. UNICEF findings (1987) showed that many Nepali girls, nearly 40 %, married before the legal age and about 7% were married before the age of 10 and those were in the *terai* region. The study illustrates further:

> In the *terai*, consistent with conservative Hindu tradition in which child marriage is highly valued, the incidence of marriage below this age is three times higher than in the hills, and six times higher than the mountains.

Although the girls are not sent to their husband's home until a few years after marriage, once married they are no longer as free as unmarried girls, and do not get an opportunity for educational enhancement The girls in this study also related that they were not happy in their marriage because there was much more to do in their husband's house than in their parent's home. [1]. These girls will never get a chance to retain their education at home, much less expand it, being burdened with household chores and perhaps having

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[1] Even so, they did not seem to repent about having married at an early age, rather they were happy to get new clothes and ornaments and other decorations that they received during marriage

babies early. They would hardly get time (as the *buharis* are heavily over worked) to nurture their babies and use their child care skills in practice. When I questioned whether they would be able to retain their literacy skills, they made no answer but a weak smile.

Change in their political situation

Women's group formation was found to be one of the areas where women experienced the opportunity to exercise their vote and enjoy power. Once elected women were responsible to hold their duties and were carrying their responsibilities very well. The women in the responsible positions were found more active than the remaining group members due to their participation in various meetings organized by the Save's office. The other women were only able to participate in the village level meetings and programs. This group was found quite active in doing some social work and hence was involved in the local development activities. As group members, women had an opportunity to participate in various processions and were thus involved in some political process showing their power as a group. In doing their group activities these women were found to gain the idea of planning and programming their future activities and had thus become the active members of the society. But this group was not able to raise the status of women making them self-dependent and politically active as do SEWA in India, Nijera Kori or BRACK in Bangladesh. Hence this seems to be an imitation of these programs, which doesn't seem to be aimed at benefiting the women-at-large.

All these activities had little effect on the women's participation in the macro level politics. None of these women were the members of any local government political system. Although they knew quite a bit about the local politics they were not found much concerned about the central level politics. The area of politics was still predominantly the men's field without a single female representation at the village level. The ward club at least has one female member out of its 11 members. Women's areas were still limited to the household apart from their income generation and group activities. Their political participation was thus found limited to voting. Women's direct participation in the politics is not a socially accepted phenomenon and if they do participate, they are not seen to possess a good moral female quality especially in these communities (Acharya, 1981). The constitution of Nepal has made provision only to set aside 5% of the seats for female candidates in each party, and political parties rarely go beyond this norm. Even in that 5%, only a few will win the vote, so the political participation of women at the central or local level is very slim.

Literacy as an empowering process according to Lampert (1988) should be politically and ideologically based. For women, she says empowerment comes not only from knowing how to read and write, but from reading about and discussing their own situations as women. Dialogue she suggests is a major part of each lesson and is crucial to the process and of course these dialogue need to discuss the political issues prevailing at the local and national level.

For these women, such dialogue could well have been about the household politics, especially in the extended family. In an extended family, women were directly involved in the competition of holding power through acquisition of property. There also seemed a sheer domination of the more powerful over the relatively powerless. The case of a widow in an extended household reveals how miserable is the situation of women even in an economically well off family. The women in the single but poor families enjoyed more power than the women in an extended but rich household. Acharya (1981) has also pointed out the lower status of women in an extended but rich family than in the poor family. The state law prohibits women from the inheritance of property hence women are solely dependent on their male partner especially their husband for their economic stability. They are thus always dependent on men for their survival; in such cases the women represent the poorest of the poor group of the society.

By being literate, women have been able to understand their rights and could exercise their rights if needed. Two of the women in the case study expressed that their family members have not treated them well at home. Sakalani, who was not satisfied with the distribution of family property while she and her husband separated from the extended family, has filed a case in the court for an equal share, while Kamala is awaiting for her chance to come because of the treatment she is getting at her home (she is sure that she will not be given an equal share if the family splits). In case this happens, she said, she is ready to take a necessary step at that time. But she was doubtful the verdict would be in her favour being a widow in an extended family.

The knowledge provided on the rights of women in the class only made women aware of their prescribed rights in the law books, however their experience showed that they needed help in determining how to exercise these rights. Often if a woman does exercise these rights in court, the decision would be in favour of the man due to his power and economic influence and so women hesitate to act on these rights.

Bee (1993) points out a critical approach to literacy as a means for enabling women who have been conditioned to accept second-class status is to affirm their aspirations as

valid and their knowledge and views of life as genuine contributions to the net stock of human understanding. Merely enabling women to read and write without reference to their social and political inequality and its origins, according to her, contributes materially to maintaining their oppression. O'Neil (1974) observed proper literacy should extend people's control over their lives, enabling them to construct coherence around experience, to deal in words and actions with their experience. Ramdas (1990) claims that most literacy programs do little to alert women to significant political and social factors which determine how they are treated within their society. Programs designed specifically for women typically serve to reinforce traditional female roles, thereby reinforcing the dependent status and mental perspective of girls and women. Bhasin (1992) suggests that women need literacy that helps them not only to read and understand the word but to read, understand and control the world; which helps not only to master three R's but to master their lives and make their destinies. Many of these statements could apply to the women who had taken the literacy program in this community.

Social hierarchy was still found to play a significant role among the women themselves. Although such a situation was discouraged in the literacy group the competition to enter into the literacy class to gain power was apparent as a process of what Bourdieu (1993) calls the role of education as "cultural production" and as Freire himself found, 'literacy is a political game'. As the entrance into the literacy class was based on the interest of the individuals, those who knew its importance would join the class to gain their power over the lower groups of the society. A non hierarchical methodology in literacy (Bhasin 1992) may reduce this problem but they can also be solved by regular participation in group activities.

All these conditions of women were not the formal topics of discussion in the class rather they were taught more lessons on hygiene and sanitation, diseases, family planning, nutrition and child care and income generation, which was seen as providing knowledge as a source of empowerment assuming them as illiterate, bearing more children, and without knowledge of health and sanitation. These are the area of development needs rather than the needs of women. They do not fulfill the requirements and needs of women who want to get relief from the drudgery of social, cultural and national process and that of male domination (Bhola, 1994, Stromquist, 1988, Moser, 1991).

Bring change in their economic situation:

One of the major objectives of the literacy program was to make women economically independent and literacy was tied up with the income generating activity. As

women did not possess any private or personal property, they are economically dependent solely on the family head, mostly the husband or other male members in the family. Even their dowry goes to the household (Acharya & Bennett, 1981). Without any source of income or access to the household property, women were limited to the area of household. The program envisaged to bring a change in women's situation by providing an opportunity to acquire income and private property. There were changes that were observed due to their participation in literacy and income generating activities in their economic conditions and these are illustrated below.

The main emphasis of the 'literacy to empower women' program was found to be involving them in economic activity; literacy was only a vehicle to meet this end as women did not hold any personal property. As only the sons are eligible to inherit their parental property, women are fully dependent on their husbands. In a traditional, agrarian society, where the land is the only source of income and women's boundary is restricted to the four walls of the household, the income generating program did provide women a chance to deal directly with cash. Due to this reason women were found very enthusiastic to be involved in the income generation activity and were able to deal with the money as a result of their involvement in these activities. Their knowledge of counting had helped them keep record of their investment and expenditure to some extent.

The income generation activity tied with literacy expected women to become self-reliant based on the assumption that literacy tied with economic upliftment would enhance women's condition and benefit the family and society at large. This WID approach to development with the underlying rationale that women are an untapped resource that can provide an economic contribution to development, has had an important influence in popularizing income generation projects for women (Moser, 1991).

Literacy and income generation programs that concentrated on home economics, health, nutrition, sewing and knitting, family planning etc. according to Stromquist (1988) are based on the premise that women's paramount role is to serve as a mother and keepers of the home emphasizing the reproductive role of women. These kinds of programs seek to make women more informed mothers, more efficient family care takers and effective home managers. Implementation of such income generating activities programs oriented mainly toward women indicate that while these programs have made progress in treating common problems affecting low-income women, they have made scarce contributions in the treatment of these problems within broader projects of social transformation. The biased nature of these programs in maintaining a definition of women as supportive actors

in the theatre of men, with no legitimate aspirations for self outside marriage and motherhood, is seldom admitted. And yet, these definitions constitute the cornerstone of patriarchal ideology, which defines women's superiority in the home and her inferiority anywhere else (Stromquist, 1988).

In income generating activity, women were involved mostly in the area where they had some earlier knowledge. Some were marketing food grains, one of them had a shop in the village, and the rest were raising animals. Until now they had just been investing in their business and not earned much profit. Some of the profit which was earned had been spent in the household. They were not found learning any new skills that the modern technological world demanded.

Moser (1991) criticizes the present income generation program as a welfare approach based on three assumptions. First, that women are passive recipients of development, rather than participants in the development process. Second, that motherhood is the most important role for women in society. Third, that child rearing is the most effective role for women on all aspects of economic development. While this approach sees itself as family centered in orientation, it focuses entirely on women in terms of their reproductive role, assumes men's role to be productive and identifies the mother-child dyads as the unit of concern. The main method of implementation is through top down hand-outs of free goods and services. When training is included it is for those skills deemed appropriate for non-working housewives and mothers. In their mothering roles, low income women have been the primary targets for improving family welfare, particularly of children, through an increasing diversity of programs.

In this respect, the literacy program experienced by these women goes beyond Moser's "welfare" description, including activity related to production as well as content related to reproductive work. On this basis, the program organizers Save the Children USA claim that the literacy and income generation programs are highly empowering to women by providing them with an opportunity for education and earning to women who otherwise would have been limited to the household drudgery and age old traditions due to illiteracy. Literacy skills, combined with functional development activities, family planning, immunization, management of diarrheal disease, forest conservation and income generation programs are the areas where women's empowerment is sought (Manandhar & Leslie 1994). Sen & Grown (1987) criticize such programs as scattered, small, and peripheral to the main thrust of planning processes with little coordination or concern for sustained financial viability. Short-term, ameliorative approach to improve women's employment

opportunities are ineffective unless they are combined with long-term strategies to reestablish people's - especially women's - control over the economic decisions that shape their lives.

The income generation program however was not benefiting all the women equally. Women, who hold the key positions in the women's organization were able to open their personal accounts in the bank because of their involvement in dealing with the banks. This situation also seemed to create a new type of hierarchy among the women themselves, adding to the existing social hierarchy. Other women were also planning to open an account in the near future, but it was still only a remote possibility for Godavari and Chhoti due to their time in the household and their lack of desire to open a personal account. The reasons for this they gave were that - they were not able to save any money as their personal money, and they did not see any necessity to have a personal account as they were being taken care of by their husband and family members. In such cases women were not found to be fully benefiting from the literacy, they still bear a subordinate position in the family, and hence were reluctant to participate fully in the income generating activity. This situation suggests the need of support services for women such as these, to facilitate their activity, if women's full participation is envisaged to empower them but such services were not deemed necessary. Many government or non government agencies do not perceive child care services as problematic since the lower-class women are believed to have extended family networks and thus have relatives who can mind the children (Stromquist, 1988). Evaluation reports of UNDP, UNICEF funded projects have revealed that usually the non-formal education programs make no provision for women's lack of mobility, time constraints, and child care responsibilities (UNDP, 1985: UNFPA, 1984).

Contrary to the above situation, some of the women still aspired to invest more money in their business and acquire greater benefits. Some of them were getting help from their family members in their business while others were doing it on their own. For those who did not get much financial support from the family, this income generation program was quite helpful in that it increased their confidence by making them economically independent especially those women who had little chance to access their household property.

Although, much remains to be done to enhance the economic condition of women through such income generating activities to empower them, it had provided an opportunity to these women who had never thought of earning for their personal benefit. It was a new

experience for them and they were doing quite well in association with other members of the group and so it was helpful in uplifting the condition of such women to some extent.

Change in their psychological situation

It is a widely accepted belief that literacy helps in building self confidence among individuals and brings change in their perspectives making them more knowledgeable and ready to accept change. This study tried to focus on these areas as a result of the women's participation in the literacy class, and there is evidence given by the women which suggests change in this respect.

Traditional cultural restriction against women and illiteracy had made them confined to the household. Although some of them (especially the Choudhari women) worked outside the home, on their farm, they mostly worked with other women rather than with the men. This seclusion made them hesitant to talk with men and also with strangers. The Acharya & Bennett study (1981) also suggests that education had little meaning to these communities where women were secluded within the household and expected to come into little contact with the outside world.

> In Indo-Aryan communities, (Maithili, and hill Brahmin) ideally all women, either educated or uneducated are secluded within the household and expected to come into little contact with the outside world. Education, while generally highly valued in Hindu groups, is still regarded as a luxury for women rather than as a potential economic asset. (p.137)

Some of the women related that after the literacy class they find it easy to express themselves with others. They seem enthusiastic to talk with people, although some of them still hesitate to talk with men. However, they are quite open to women and discuss their problems and seem enthusiastic to learn more from others.

Most of the women regarded that their lack of knowledge about the main stream language (Nepali) made them hesitant to talk with the other people apart from their own community members. Now as they learned Nepali in the literacy class (because the literacy primers are in Nepali) it made it easier to express themselves with outsiders who could not understand their local dialect. They were willing to learn more Nepali so that they could talk and express themselves well with other people. The knowledge of Nepali language was also essential because it is the national and official language. Without the knowledge of Nepali they could not deal with official matters such as going to bank for loans etc.

There are arguments regarding the use of language in literacy. Some hold the view that the local language is essential to increase the self-esteem among people. The standing

committee of Aboriginal Tribes in Canada has put emphasis on the use of local language for literacy as a source of empowerment for the people. It further contended that if a minority language is ignored or suppressed for the sake of national considerations, the language group finds itself in a disadvantaged and marginalized position. In contrast, most of the Unesco's policy emphasizes the use of national language in literacy as a process of bringing the poor and marginalized people into the main stream of development. Chlebowska (1990) emphasizes the use of the mainstream language in literacy for women with low self-esteem due to their lack of it. The case study also showed that the knowledge of mainstream language was essential for women, and was also the cause of marginalization among them. They strongly emphasized the importance of knowledge of the national language, and in this case it seems to have contributed to their psychological well-being.

Women also had a negative self-image of themselves because of the prejudices prevailing against women in the society. Some of the beliefs they related were that they are inferior to men, because of their fate they were born as women, they were without brains and knowledge and could not do anything. Such prejudices according to them pushed them back from gaining knowledge and contributed to their lack of self confidence. They saw it as due to illiteracy among women. As they did not know how to read and write, they were obviously deprived of various knowledge sources. In their view, people who have education, know many things and are better than illiterate people. With the literacy class, as they stated, they also feel confident to some extent with the feeling that they are literate now and no one can call them illiterate fools. Yet they think that, they still need to do more to bring change in themselves to come to the level of other women in Nepal. They mentioned that they were far behind the hill women in this regard. The women's participation in literacy class according to them, made them able to understand the shortcomings in themselves but it could do little to change the attitude of men towards them.

It was found that literacy helped to bring out the latent potential of the women. One woman in the group could compose poems to express her feelings. This has built confidence in her to learn more and do even better. This has given self satisfaction and encouragement to her when her talent was recognized.

Their involvement in the income generation program has made some women more active and mobile when they have to deal with banks and with the outsiders. This has compelled them to face the outer world, and has reduced their hesitation to contact with

other people. Their low self-esteem, related to considering themselves inferior to men and not being able to deal in cash matters due to illiteracy, has been overcome to some extent by being literate. The income generation program has made some women independent in that respect. However this is not the case with all of them; some women have still to go a long way to be equal with these women, for they still need their men's help in dealing with economic activities.

In a hierarchical society of caste, class and gender, literacy sometimes also becomes a weapon to alleviate this hierarchy. It happened in one of the groups that one of the women demanded a key position in the group because of her higher caste and performance in the literacy class. But her assertive demand was reprimanded by group consensus. In this case the literacy program became a forum for the weak to become activated in a group and help build self confidence among them.

Apart from this one case, the formation of the group after the literacy program was found to be one of the major sources to build self-confidence among the women. As women share similar problems, they could arrive at a consensus and work for each other.

Women's groups according to Sen & Grown (1987) are empowering to women to develop political will and the mass potential of women's networks. Further, the particular perspective of poor women gives centrality to the fulfillment of basic survival needs as the priority issue; and so they are committed and energetic actors once avenues for action emerge. Such groups she further illustrates, should have certain requisites which include resource (finance, knowledge, technology), skill training, and leadership formation on the one side and democratic processes, dialogue, participation in policy decision making, and techniques for conflict resolution on the other.

Some of the women's groups that are working for women's empowerment in South Asia are - Nijera Kori, BRAC, Gonoshasthyo kendra, in Bangladesh; WAF and Sindhyani Tehereeq in Pakistan; SEWA, ASTHA, and Chipko movement in India. At the government level, the PCRW program in Nepal and Women's development programs in India are two examples (Bhasin, 1992). SEWA in India is an example of a poor women's organization that testifies that with some intermediary effort poor women can learn to organize themselves collectively to great effect. This organization runs counter to the myth prevalent in trade unions and bureaucratic circles that women are inherently more conservative in their consciousness and hence more difficult to organize (Sen & Grown, 1987). In this study area the new women's group is far removed from these large and active organizations, but perhaps it is a beginning for such developments.

Conclusion

The curiosity I had in my mind as a result of reading various literature sources, was whether literacy that is based on a functionalist/developmentalist paradigm could be a source of empowerment for women, against what most of the critical thinkers regard as its inability to empower due to its emphasizing the reproductive role of women. This study was conducted on the Maithili women who are socially and culturally restricted due to the *purdah* system and economically limited with the lack of access to their personal property, to see whether and how they found literacy to be an empowering process. What are my conclusions?

Literacy in itself has been able to generate an undercurrent of an empowerment process among the Maithili women due to their exposure to a written culture which differs from their oral culture. To be literate itself has become a power for them in the largely illiterate society. Now they think that they can express their views in a written form and moreover they now feel linked with the mainstream society through their new or better developed bilingual capacity (acquisition of the National language) and they are building confidence through their new expressive power and access to the outer society.

The accumulation of information from the literacy primers and discussion sessions in the class, has empowered them to gain social status as a *janne Aimai* (knowledgeable woman) in the illiterate world. Hence some of the information regarding their rights has become like a life-blood, developing self esteem in them.

Although literacy was regarded by the women as empowering in respect of gaining knowledge which they lacked in various fields, the knowledge they mentioned was limited to areas of the household and providing health and sanitation lessons to women had little impact in their day to day practice. To some degree, they were not able to use that knowledge in practice because of family structure and its impact on who attended classes (mothers-in-law, not young daughters-in-law). A lack of opportunity for praxis in this type of literacy activity seems to be a problem that needs more attention, and it contrasts sharply to the opportunity for practice in income generation related knowledge.

A culturally de-powered Maithili woman finds literacy a means to empower her. By empowerment she thinks of an accumulation of external information, the means to develop a sense that I am not a subject to be subjugated, a way to be able to raise questions against the social status quo, and a way to organize herself and others for change and

development. Her meaning to empowerment complies with Kreisberg's (1992) "power with" relationship which is not domination or subordination but understanding each other. Similarly, it is a capacity to act in a relationship, a capacity to engage in an open but mutually empathic relation process, or "being able" to do something by herself (Surray, 1987; Miller, 1982).

But what still seems to be lacking is the ability to gain self confidence, be self assertive, conscious, and critically aware and eventually liberate (Kasam, 1989:531) herself mentally and physically; a socio-political concept beyond "participation" and "consciousness raising", and a notion implying "a person is ready to take action at all times whether in power or not" (Stromquist, 1988). Empowerment for the Maithili women at this point still needs a "further power" to be viable in many aspects of their lives. Yet, each aspect, seen as a component in Stromquist's (1988) definition of empowerment, applies well to the empowerment of Maithili women. These three components are cognitive, psychological, and economic.

The cognitive component of empowerment refers to women's understanding of their conditions of subordination and the reasons creating these conditions. It involves knowledge about their sexuality beyond family planning techniques, for taboos on sex information have mystified the reality on women's and men's nature and provided justification for women's physical and mental control. In addition much more attention needs to be paid to the legal rights of women and making them aware of their rights.

The psychological components of empowerment include the development of the feeling that women can improve their condition. They must be able to believe that they can succeed through their own efforts and as self-confidence and self-esteem cannot be taught, women should be provided with conditions in which they can develop. A literacy for women's empowerment should therefore involve women in projects as participants rather than beneficiaries with the aim of involving women in all stages with the same intensity .

The economic component of empowerment which seems lacking in the present program, as suggested by Stromquist, signifies that women should be able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of independence. This component needs to be accompanied by the knowledge of marketability of the product.

What is less clearly addressed in Stromquist's three components, is the need for the women to be able to participate in long-term change in their community. Bee (1993) points out that, unless literacy contains opportunities for women to analyze critically the social

causes for so many of them lacking confidence in their own abilities and especially the relationship between this state of mind and women's social conditioning within the family, education, religion and the state - there is little chance of women moving beyond enhanced personal attitudes to a deeper awareness of the need for structural change. Teaching women to read and write through critical analysis of generative themes which reflect their lives and experiences as suggested by Freire is one possible solution. Any lesser view according to Bee only helps to promote and prolong what Freire calls their domestication.

In this context, my study has shown that there are constraints that are associated with what Bourdieu (1993) calls "cultural reproduction" in the road to empowerment of women by the introduction of literacy. These constraints are observed both at the conceptual and the operational level. To address the constraints at the conceptual level the support of men is required, because both men and women are responsible for relegating to history the persisting tradition which leaves women so vulnerable. As all men are not oppressors, it is not difficult to change the attitude of many men towards women by bringing examples from different sources that can be found in our history. The ideals of Gandhi and Buddha could be presented to change machismo attitudes of men. As both men and women share labour for their survival, men's role for the upliftment of women cannot be ignored; and women's problems cannot be solved in isolation as both of them are interdependent in the society. Literacy can be a great hope even to the illiterates by bringing attitudinal changes in individuals, what Gandhi called "in the tradition of unlettered intellectual giants" (Attenborough, 1982:14-15).

Although reading, writing and arithmetic skills are indispensable in the technological world of today, a literacy that provides individuals a chance to read their own world seems to be the need of the day especially for the women in this community who remained illiterate due to various socio-cultural and political reasons. A need of empowering pedagogy aiming at building strong individuals without the cost of making others less independent in the case of women seems evident here.

However, the components suggested by Stromquist as mentioned earlier seem necessary to enhance the condition of women in the Maithili community, but not sufficient. As the literacy training provided at present did not touch many gender and social issues their problems remained the same as before, as revealed in their interviews. Although women mentioned that the literacy knowledge provided to them had been able to build self-confidence among them giving them a chance for external exposure and access to private property, their situation in the family remained the same due mainly to cultural constraints.

Women in a Nepali village are culturally segregated into caste, age, and gender relationships. As these socio-cultural aspects pose a dominant role in the lives of women,when they have not been highlighted while dealing with literacy, women's empowerment in this regard can hardly be achieved, as was found in this study. It is essential to deal with their subjugated cultural knowledge in the literacy program, if the literacy program is intended to empower women (Parajuli & Enslin, 1990). The cultural context perpetuates an authoritarian approach in Maithili society no matter whether a male or senior female exercises it.

The introduction of a dialogical approach in the authoritarian culture has introduced a process for the literate Maithili women who now can ask question about the persisting hierarchy of caste, gender relationships, age and so on within herself. But whether this much knowledge will empower women is a big question in a society where various hierarchies still play such a significant role. Women still do not have an independent existence as the state policy itself favours men as the inheritor of property, and a woman's position is entirely defined by her father's, husband's, or son's status (Acharya, 1981).

This literacy program, at least partly a "consciously emancipatory" approach (Ramdas, 1990) has become a means to confidence building for Maithili women by ensuring mobility, and initiating group activities to organize, to discuss, to come to conclusions, and to implement their decisions. Especially the group activities were found helpful for women to gain confidence and it has made them more enthusiastic in their activities. The group itself has been a source of empowerment to those women who lack self-confidence and self-esteem. Moreover the group has become helpful by bringing solidarity among women alleviating the feeling of high and low caste or of a high and low group. Women in the group share their problems and get empowerment from each other. Strengthening of this group with more programs and support services and providing continuity to the literacy and income generation activities may help women in the long run.

Prior to the literacy program, the position of Maithili women was found to be no different from what Smock (1977, quoted in Acharya, 1981:208) observed, with women dependent solely upon men and having no independent status socially or economically. But the income generation activity in the literacy project which enabled them to acquire personal property was found to be leading them along the road to economic empowerment, at least to some extent. Some of the women have now become able to identify resources for income generation, sell products, keep accounts, and deposit their earned cash in the local bank.

Yet, the constraints at the operational level which work against empowering women seem to continue in this situation without a proper supportive institution. For example, a woman who knew the technique to become economically self-reliant in her literacy program, lacked resources and a continued support system from her family. This situation seems, on one hand to bring frustration in the long run, and on the other almost all of the reading materials that prepared her for what Freire calls "domesticated" living do not seem to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to face the challenges of the modern technological world. They were thus not able to generate more income due to the limited resources and knowledge they acquired, compared to what they needed to enhance their economic situation. Again, most of their income was spent on their family welfare rather than for their personal needs or establishing a cooperative for long term sustenance of the program. How to establish a cooperative or organization of women which could take care of their activities as in SEWA in India or BRAC in Bangladesh appears to be a major issue in this context.

The above situations, seem to continue in the lack of a strong organization when women's private property rights have not been guaranteed by the state. Most of the women were still found to depend on their husbands and in case of the withdrawal of the project the danger of the women returning back to their previous condition is obvious. This is not to suspect the men, but for the benefit of women, there needs to be some provision of support services to bring into these activities women who cannot get time from their household chores and baby care.

Studies conducted a decade ago (Acharya & Bennett, 1981; Acharya, 1981) had indicated these same cultural problems such as men's control over cash, decision making, and outside resources associated with young women. The situation is still unchanged in the case of illiterate Maithili women. In order to overcome this constraint Acharya (1981) had suggested women-specific programs and inclusion of older women in the programs if women were to be brought into the mainstream development process in this society and hence increase their participation. However my study leads me to conclude differently in the sense that the situation did not change through the decade's experience, and I see the importance of getting men's help into women's program as the need of the day. In order to do that the young Maithili women (especially the *buharis*), who badly need literacy skills and economic enhancement for empowerment, can be instrumental. The social and cultural traditions, domestic chores, and in addition the child care were found to put more pressure on these young women who should have been the target groups of the literacy activities, leaving hardly any time to participate in any other activities. This suggests a separate

literacy program for young women by convincing the men and the older women to cooperate in the young women's endeavours so that young Maithili women can prepare an atmosphere for change with their relatives' help and succeed to empower themselves through literacy.

Such programs, built upon the successful involvement of older women in this program, might indeed provide for a literacy which is truly empowering. Empowering literacy in such a context would enable the whole community not only to develop confidence, higher income levels and better child care, but to move to relationships between men and women, husband and wife, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and the members of all the castes which would ensure dignity, self-respect and continued development for all.

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Appendix I

Glossary of Maithili/Nepali Terms

Maithili	Nepali	English
Alhu	Aaloo	Potato
Aangan	Aangan	Courtyard
Abibahit	Abibahit	Unmarried
Achar	Achar	Pickle
An	Anna	Food grain
Aurat / Janijat	Aaimai	Woman
Aya arjan mulak	Aya arjan mulak	Income generation program
Baap	Ba / Buwa	Father
Bachcha	Nani	Baby
Badkababu	Thulobuwa	Father's older brother
Badkee Nanad/didi	Amaju /didi	Husband's older sister
Badki Mya	Thuliama	Father's older brother's wife
Bahin	Bahini	Younger sister
Bahu	Bhai buhari	Younger brother's wife
Baink	Baink	Bank
Bajaar	Bajaar	Market
Bakari	Bakhra	Female goat
Baranda	Dalan	Balcony
Bari	Bari	Fallow land
Basghara	Baithak	Living room

Appendix I(cont'd)

Maithili	Nepali	English
Bayal, barad	Goru	Ox (bull)
Bayalgadi	Goru-gada	Bullock-cart
Beta	Chhora	Son
Beti	Chhori	Daughter
Bhabhi	Bhauju	Elder brother's wife
Bhagina	Bhanja	Sister's son
Bhagini	Bhanji	Sister's daughter
Bhai /Bhya	Bhai	Younger brother
Bhais	Bhaisi	Water-buffalo
Bhaiya	Daju	Elder brother
Bhansa	Bhaansa	Kitchen
Bhat	Bhat	Rice
Bhatij	Bhatija	Nephew (Brother's son)
Bhatiji	Bhatiji	Niece (Brother's daughter)
Bibahit	Bibahit	Married
Bimar	Birami	Sick
Bista	Bista	Stool
Brikshya ropan	Brikshya ropan	Tree plantation
Bua	Phoopu	Father's sister
Budh	Budho	Old man
Budhiyah	Budhi	Old woman
Chapati	Roti	Flat bread
Chatni	Chatni	Pickle

Appendix I(cont'd)

Maithili	Nepali	English
Chauri	Chaur	Field
Chawal	Chamal	Rice
Chhagar, pathi	Patha-pathi	Baby goats
Chiura	Chiura	Flat rice
Chula	Chulo	Stove
Dada	Hajurbuwa	Grandfather
Dadi	Hajurama	Grandmother
Dal	Dal	Lentil, pulse
Daru	Raksi, jaand	Liquor
Deurani	Deurani	Husband's younger brother's wife
Dewar / Diyar	Dewar	Husband's younger brother
Dhan	Dhan	Paddy
Dhibeti	Chelibeti	Married girls of a family
Dhiyaputa	Ketaketi / Chhorachhori	Children
Dibiya	Dibiya, batti	Kerosene lamp
Didi	Didi	Elder sister
Dookan	Pasal	Shop
Gahun	Gahun	Wheat
Gai	Gai	Cow
Gaun, gam	Gaun	Village
Gauna, Duragaman	Dura Gaman	Going to husband's home for the first time after marriage
Ghar / Lahira	Ghar	Affinal home/husband's house
Ghar	Ghar	House

Appendix I(cont'd)

Maithili	Nepali	English
Ghunghat	Ghumto	Veil
Guhali	Goth	Cowshed
Haijaa	Haijaa	Cholera
Hath	Hata	Hand
Hatiya	Haat-bajar	Marketplace
Jagir	Jagir	Job
Jalkhai	Khaja	Breakfast
Jangali	Jangali	Behaving like wild, without manners
Jawain	Jwain	Younger sister's husband
Jeeja	Bhinaju	Elder sister's husband
Jeth	Jethaju	Husband's older brother
Jethani	Jethani didi	Wife's older brother's wife
Jethani	Jethani	Husband's older brother's wife
Jethsar	Jethan	Wife's older brother
Jethsas	Jethi sasu	Wife's older sister
Juwa	Juwa	Gambling
Kacha ghar	Kachi ghar	House made of mud and thatch
Kaka / Chacha	Kaka	Father's younger brother
Kaki / Chachi	Kaki	Father's younger brother's wife
Kal	Kaldhara	Tube well
Khana	Khana	Lunch of Suppper
Khasi	Khasi	Goat

Appendix I(cont'd)

Maithili	Nepali	English
Koot-pit	Koot-pit	Beating
Kuwa, inar	Inar	Well
Laaj	Laaj	Shame
Ladka	Keta	Boy
Ladki	Keti	Girl
Lohati	Lohati	A small water-pot
Loor	Seep	Skill
Machh	Machha	Fish
Machha-palan	Machha-palan	Fishery
Mai	Ama	Mother
Maike	Maiti	Consanguinal home/parent's house
Mama	Mama	Mother's brother
Mami	Maiju	Mother's brother's wife
Mandir	Mandir	Temple
Mard	Logne	Husband
Mard	Logne-manchhe	Man
Maugi / Aurat /Janijat	Swasni	Wife
Maugi log	Aaimai haru	Womenfolk
Mausa	Sanobuwa	Mother's younger sister's husband
Mausa	Thulobuwa	Mother's older sister's husband
Mausi	Sanima	Mother's younger sister
Mausi	Thuliama	Mother's older sister

Appendix I(cont'd)

Maithili	Nepali	English
Mela	Mela	Fair
Murahi, muri	Siraula / Murahi	Puffed rice
Naak	Naak	Nose
Nait	Nati	Daughter's son
Nana	Hajurbuwa	Maternal Grandfather
Nanad	Nanda	Husband's younger sister
Nani	Hajurama	Maternal Grandmother
Natin	Natini	Daughter's daughter
Pabni	Chad-parwa	Festival
Padtai	Padchha	Will study
Pakka ghar	Pakki ghar	Brick house
Pariwar niyojan	Pariwar niyojan	Family planning
Patohu / bahu	Buhari	Daughter-in-law
Ped	Rookh	Tree
Peda	Goreto	Pavement
Pokhair	Pokhari	Pond
Pota	Nati	Son's son
Poti	Natini	Son's daughter
Pyaj	Pyaja	Onion
Rajmarg	Rajmarg	Highway
Rasta	Bato	Way
Reen	Reen	Loan
Sadak	Sadak	Road
Sag / Sabji	Tarkari	Vegetables
Sag	Sag	Green leaf (Vegetable)

Appendix I(cont'd)

Maithili	Nepali	English
Sair	Sali	Wife's younger sister
Sakchhyarta	Sakchhyarta	Literacy
Samuha	Samuha	Group
Sangathan	Sangathan	Organization
Sar	Salo	Wife's younger brother
Sar-safayi	Sar-safayi	Cleanup
Sas	Sasu	Mother-in-law
Sasur	Sasura	Father-in-law
Saut	Sauta	Step-wife (Husband's other wife)
Taas	Taas	Playing cards
Tarkari / Sag	Tarkari	Vegetable
Tarkari bari	Karesa bari	Kitchen garden
Tel	Tel	Oil
Than	Than	Religious shrine
Tori	Tori	Mustard seed

Appendix II
Ethnic Description of Ward no. 3

Table 2: Ethnicity, Gender Distribution and Literacy in Ward 3

Ethnicity	Households	Population		Total	Literate	Illiterate
		F	M			
Choudhari	33	129	128	247	140	107
Saha	13	48	47	95	42	53
Khatwe	21	51	59	110	24	86
Dhanuk	2	7	8	15	2	13
Total	69	241	234	465	212	253

Appendix III

School Enrollment in Bhawanipur 1993 and 1994

Table 3: School Enrollment Class 1 to 10

	1993			1994		
Grade	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1	23	14	37	54	27	81
2	18	11	29	24	6	30
3	24	8	32	18	12	30
4	23	9	32	25	9	34
5	22	8	30	27	9	36
6	64	23	87	58	26	84
7	65	17	82	64	20	84
8	50	11	61	65	15	80
9	42	9	51	47	15	62
10	No Grade 10 Yet			43	11	54
Total	331	110	441	425	150	575

Table 4: School Enrollment in New Primary School, class 1 - 2

	1993			1994		
Grade	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1	26	22	48	47	25	72
2	No Class Yet			15	8	23

Note: This primary school is only up to grade level two at present.

Appendix IV

School Enrollment/Ethnicity 1993

Table 5: School Enrollment by Ethnicity in the Main School 1993

	Choudhary			Saha			Khatwe			Others			Yadav		
Gr	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T
1	12	8	20	7	3	10	6	1	7						
2	10	7	17	7	2	9	3	-	3						
3	5	7	12	10	3	13	5	2	7						
4	8	6	14	8	5	13	4	1	5						
5	6	9	15	6	6	12	1	2	3						
6	12	10	22	7	4	11	9	-	9	25	5	20	20	5	25
7	17	11	28	12	8	20	5	-	5	5	1	6	19	4	23
8	15	9	24	10	9	19	3	1	4	5	-	5	6	3	9
9	14	12	26	7	5	12	2	-	2	3	2	5	4	2	6
10	no grade 10 yet														

Gr. = Grade; B = Boys; G = Girls; T = Total

Others = Paswan, Chamar, Malah, Mahto etc.

Appendix V

School Enrollment/Ethnicity 1994

Table 6: School Enrollment by Ethnicity in the Main School 1994

	Choudhary			Saha			Khatwe			Others			Yadav		
Gr	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T
1	20	8	28	12	3	15	6	2	8	12	18	30			
2	9	9	18	8	2	10	3	1	4						
3	10	6	16	10	2	12	1	1	2						
4	6	4	10	11	1	12	5	2	7						
5	10	3	13	9	2	11	4	1	5	2	1	3	2	2	4
6	13	2	15	9	4	13	2	-	2	8	6	13	32	8	40
7	19	4	23	13	5	18	3	1	4	16	4	20	13	5	17
8	15	4	19	12	4	16	4	3	7	16	2	18	12	5	17
9	16	8	24	14	4	18	7	2	9	1	1	2	6	3	9
10	19	7	26	10	7	17	3	-	3	1	-	1	5	2	7

Gr. = Grade; B = Boys; G = Girls; T = Total

Others = Paswan, Chamar, Malah, Mahto etc.

Women and children in the village

Side view of the village with children and animals in the background

Women in the sewing training class inside the club house

Women going to the fair.